



Depression

It's Not Just in Your Head

Everyone, at various times in life, feels sad. This is normal. Sometimes sadness

comes from things that happen in your life: you move to a different city and leave behind friends, you lose your job or a loved one dies. But what's the difference between "normal" feelings of sadness and the feelings caused by clinical depression?

How to Recognize Depression

Depression is not a character flaw or sign of personal weakness. You can't make yourself well by trying to "snap out of it" or "lighten up." And you can't catch it from someone else, although it can run in families. To understand what depression is, it's important to recognize the symptoms:

- Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- Significant changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Irritability, anger, agitation
- Worry, anxiety
- Pessimism, indifference
- Loss of energy, persistent lethargy
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or hopelessness
- Inability to concentrate, indecisiveness
- Inability to take pleasure in former interests, social withdrawal
- Excessive consumption of alcohol or use of chemical substances
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide

If you or someone you know has thoughts of death or suicide, contact a medical professional, clergy member, loved one or friend *immediately*.

If you experience five or more of these symptoms for more than two weeks or if any of these symptoms interfere with work or family activities, contact your doctor for a thorough examination. This includes a complete physical exam and a review of your family's history of illness. Do not try to diagnose yourself. Only a health care professional can determine if you have depression.

Bipolar Disorder

More Than A Mood Swing

Bipolar disorder is a treatable medical illness marked by extreme changes in mood, thought, energy and behavior. It is also known as *manic depression* because a person's mood can alternate between *mania* and *depression*. This change in mood or "mood swing" can last for hours, days, weeks or even months.

How to Recognize Mania

Unlike people with clinical (unipolar) depression, most people who have bipolar disorder talk about experiencing the "highs" and "lows" of the illness. The "highs" are periods of mania or intense bursts of energy or euphoria, which include some or all of the following symptoms:

- Increased physical and mental activity and energy
- Heightened mood, exaggerated optimism and self-confidence
- Excessive irritability, aggressive behavior
- Decreased need for sleep without experiencing fatigue
- Grandiose delusions, inflated sense of self-importance
- Racing speech, racing thoughts, flight of ideas
- Impulsiveness, poor judgment, distractibility
- Reckless behavior such as spending sprees, rash business decisions, erratic driving and sexual indiscretions
- In the most severe cases, delusions and hallucinations

Bipolar disorder affects more than two and a half million adult Americans. Like depression and other serious illnesses, bipolar disorder can also have an impact on spouses, family members, friends and people in the workplace. It usually begins in late adolescence (often appearing as depression during teen years) although it can start in early childhood or as late as the 40s and 50s. An equal number of men and women develop this illness and it is found among all ages, races, ethnic groups and social classes. The illness tends to run in families and is inherited in many cases.

Mood swings that come with bipolar disorder can be severe, ranging from extremes in energy to deep despair. The severity of the mood swings and the way they disrupt normal activities are what make bipolar mood episodes different from ordinary mood changes.



Treatment

Sometimes it's hard to ask for help. If you or someone you know has a mood disorder, you may be feeling especially vulnerable, and talking to someone about it may be the last thing you want to do. But finding the right treatment is the first step in becoming an active manager of an illness like depression or bipolar disorder. Finding the right treatment starts with finding the right mental health professional.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy or "talk therapy" is an important part of treatment for many people. It can sometimes work alone in cases of mild to moderate depression. A good therapist can help you modify behavioral or emotional patterns that contribute to your illness. People with bipolar disorder and/or chronic depression usually benefit from a combination of medication and talk therapy.

Medication

The choice to take medication is entirely yours, but know that many people with mood disorders have significantly improved their lives because they've adhered to a treatment plan that includes medication. Though medication does not guarantee all your problems will be solved, the right one can improve your ability to cope with life's problems and restore your sense of judgment.

Alternative Treatments

DBSA recognizes that dietary supplements and other alternative treatments that are advertised to have a positive effect on depression or bipolar disorder regularly enter the marketplace. DBSA does not endorse or discourage the use of these treatments. However, be aware that alternative treatments may have side effects or interact with prescribed medications, so read labels carefully and discuss them with your doctor or pharmacist before taking them.

Living with Depression or Bipolar Disorder

As with other chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease or asthma, people with mood disorders should see themselves as managers of their illness. Depression and bipolar disorder are *treatable*, but they are not yet curable. For many people, depression and bipolar disorder are chronic illnesses. If severe depressive and/or manic episodes reappear at some point in your life, don't panic. Your experience with previous episodes puts you one giant step ahead in the process of recognizing symptoms and getting help. By continuing your treatment plan, you can greatly reduce your chances of having symptoms recur.

The Value of DBSA Support Groups

With a grassroots network of more than 1,000 DBSA support groups, no one with depression or bipolar disorder needs to feel alone or ashamed. DBSA may offer one or more support groups in your community. Each group has a professional advisor and appointed facilitators. Members are people living with depression or bipolar disorder and their loved ones. As an addition to treatment, DBSA support groups:

- Can help increase treatment adherence and may help people avoid hospitalization.
- Provide a place for mutual acceptance, understanding and self-discovery.
- Help people understand that mood disorders do not define who they are.
- Give people the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of those who have "been there."

Take the next step toward wellness for you or someone you love. Contact DBSA to locate the group nearest you. If there is no DBSA support group in your community, DBSA can help you start one. Just give us a call at (800) 826-3632, write to us at 730 N. Franklin St., Suite 501, Chicago, IL 60610-7224 or visit www.DBSAlliance.org.

Become a Friend of DBSA

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- I wish my gift to remain anonymous.
- Please send me _____ donation envelopes to share.
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- I'd like to receive more information about mood disorders.
- Please send all correspondence in a confidential envelope.

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Questions? Call (800) 826-3632 or (312) 642-0049

Credit card payments (Visa, MasterCard or Discover) may be faxed to (312) 642-7243.

Secure online donations may be made at www.DBSAlliance.org.

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Suicide Prevention

If you are having suicidal thoughts, it is important to recognize these thoughts for what they are: expressions of a treatable medical illness. Don't let embarrassment stand in the way of vital communication with your doctor, family and friends; *take immediate action*. You can take important first steps to manage these symptoms.

- Tell your mental health professional immediately.
- Tell a trusted family member, friend or other support person.
- Regularly schedule health care appointments.
- Instruct a close supporter to take your credit cards, checkbook, and car keys when suicidal feelings become persistent.
- Make sure guns, other weapons and old medications are not available.
- Keep pictures of your favorite people visible at all times.
- For help in a crisis, call the National Hopeline Network at (800) 442-HOPE.

Develop a Wellness Lifestyle

Keep the following in mind as you discover your own ways to reduce symptoms and maintain wellness:

- Regularly talk to your counselor, doctor or other health care professional.
- Share talking and listening time with a friend.
- Do exercises that help you relax, focus and reduce stress.
- Participate in fun, affirming and creative activities.
- Record your thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Create a daily planning calendar.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Allow yourself to be exposed to light.
- Improve your diet. Avoid caffeine, sugar and heavily salted foods.
- Change the stimulation in your environment.
- Attend a local DBSA support group regularly.



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

We've been there.
We can help.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading patient-directed national organization focusing on the most prevalent mental illnesses. The organization fosters an environment of understanding about the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-date, scientifically-based tools and information written in language the general public can understand. DBSA supports research to promote more timely diagnosis, develop more effective and tolerable treatments and discover a cure. The organization works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably.

Assisted by a Scientific Advisory Board comprised of the leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 1,000 peer-run support groups across the country. Nearly two million people request and receive information and assistance each year. DBSA's mission is to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

(Previously National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association)
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Website: www.DBSAlliance.org

Visit our updated, interactive website for important information, breaking news, chapter connections, advocacy help and much more.

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DBSA does not endorse or recommend the use of any specific treatments or medications for mood disorders. For advice about specific treatments or medications, individuals should consult their physicians and/or mental health professionals.

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Introduction to Depression and Bipolar Disorder



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We've been there. We can help.

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