

# What is Depression?

Depression is a mood disorder. It affects how you feel, think, and behave.



## WHAT DOES IT FEEL LIKE?

The symptoms are different from person to person. Symptoms might be worse for some people than others. You may feel sad for weeks, months, or years. You may feel angry or irritable, hopeless, worthless, or empty. You may have a hard time sleeping or eating. Your energy may be low. You may not be interested in things you used to enjoy.

## WHAT CAUSES IT?

There are many causes of depression. There may be long-term stress in your life. You may have had big life changes. It may be an illness that runs in your family. Your hormones may play a role too.

## HOW CAN I GET BETTER?

### LIFESTYLE CHANGES

**Exercise regularly.** Exercise can help you feel better. Both aerobic exercise (like jogging) and anaerobic exercise (like weight lifting) can be helpful. Talk to your health care professional about exercise that interests you. Exercise for at least 25–40 minutes, 3–4 times per week.



**Try yoga.** This mind-body exercise may help you deeply relax. It is good exercise too! There are many different types of yoga. There is a type of yoga for you.

**Eat healthy.** The food you eat can impact how you feel. Do you drink caffeinated or alcoholic beverages? Do you eat food with a lot of sugar? These foods and drinks may make you feel more tired and depressed. Try to eat more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. Food like walnuts, salmon, sardines, green leafy vegetables, and flax seed are especially good for you. Would you like more help? Try the anti-inflammatory diet. Visit the webpage below to learn more.

**Write in a journal.** Write down your thoughts and feelings. It may help you to express pain, anger, and fear, or to choose to write about what you are grateful for.

## COUNSELING

Sharing your thoughts and feelings with a therapist can help. There are different kinds of talk therapy. These include cognitive therapy, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and psychotherapy. You should talk to your health professional about how to choose a type of therapy that is right for you.



## HERBAL MEDICINES AND SUPPLEMENTS

Some plants and nutritional supplements might help your depression. These include St. John's Wort and SAM-e (s-adenosyl-methionine). But some of these natural medicines can interfere with other medicines you may be taking. Talk to your health care professional to see if they are right for you.

## OTHER INTEGRATIVE THERAPIES

These therapies can help you feel better and help you prevent future depression. They can be combined with standard health care. Ask your healthcare provider for more information.

**Phototherapy:** Ultraviolet light helps your body make hormones to stay healthy. Using a light box for 20 minutes a day may be very helpful.

**Music Therapy:** Certain kinds of music can positively impact your mood. You can work with a music therapist or listen to soothing music on your own.

**Acupuncture:** This is a Traditional Chinese treatment using very thin needles in the skin. It can be uncomfortable but it is not usually painful. You may find it very relaxing.

For more information, scan the QR code below, or visit [nciph.org/depression](http://nciph.org/depression)



