

Get Healthy with Your Benefits: Depression

VEBA online



Did you know that, in any given one-year period, approximately 18.8 million American adults suffer from depression? Depression typically interferes with the way a person functions and causes pain and suffering to those who have a disorder — as well as his or her family and friends.

Most people with depression do not seek treatment. But, without treatment, symptoms of depression can last for weeks, months, or years. Appropriate treatment, however, can help most people who suffer from depression.

Following are some common types of depression.

Major depressive disorder

Major depression is characterized by a combination of symptoms (see “Common symptoms” below) that interfere with a person’s ability to work, study, sleep, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities.

People who suffer from major depression may also experience physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, and muscle tension and/or psychological signs and symptoms, such as a diminished ability to think or make decisions, guilt, low self-esteem, hopelessness, and thoughts about death and suicide.

This type of depression may occur only once in a lifetime. However, once people have had one episode of major depressive disorder, it's more likely that they'll experience several more depressive episodes later in their lives.

Dysthymia

A less severe type of depression is dysthymia. People with this disorder suffer long-term, chronic symptoms that aren't disabling, but do keep them from functioning or feeling well. They may occasionally enjoy themselves, but generally their mood is low and they often become upset over minor things.

online resources

If you need help, call the employee assistance program (EAP) at 1-800-999-9585. You can speak confidentially with a counselor 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The EAP is administered by PacifiCare Behavioral Health of California (PBHC), and is available to you and all members of your household, regardless of which VEBA medical plan you choose.

The EAP arranges behavioral health care services with participating providers. You may be responsible for a copay each time you visit a participating provider. For a listing of participating providers in your area, call PBHC or go to www.pbhi.com.

An online resource is The Depression Center at <http://www.depressioncenter.net/>.

The Depression Center offers the following free tools:

- **The depression test** — take a test to see if you have a depressive disorder
- **The depression diary** — a software application that helps you track your mood
- **Online support group** — a professionally moderated support community.

Bipolar disorder

Also known as manic-depressive illness, bipolar disorder isn't as common as other forms of depressive disorders, and is characterized by cycling mood changes — severe highs (mania) as well as severe lows (depression). Sometimes the mood switches are dramatic and rapid, but usually they are gradual. When in the depressed cycle, an individual can have any or all of the symptoms of a depressive disorder. When in the manic cycle, the individual may be overactive, overtalkative, and have a great deal of energy. Mania often affects thinking, judgment, and social behavior in ways that cause serious problems and embarrassment.

Causes of depression

Some causes of depression include:

- Genetic makeup
- Stresses at home, work, or school
- Physical changes in the body (i.e., medical illnesses)
- Serious loss, difficult relationship, financial problem, or any stressful (unwelcome or even desired) change in life patterns.

How you can help yourself

Here are some things you can do to help yourself when you're feeling exhausted, worthless, helpless or hopeless:

- Set realistic goals
- Break large tasks into small ones — do what you can when you can
- Try to be with other people and to confide in someone
- Participate in activities that typically make you feel better — mild exercise, going to a movie, attending a concert or sports event
- Expect your mood to improve gradually; don't expect immediate results
- Consult a mental health provider.

Common symptoms of depression

Common symptoms of depression include, but are not limited to:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness and pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, and making decisions
- Trouble sleeping or waking up
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness and irritability
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain.