



# Patient education: When you have depression and another health problem (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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## Is depression common among people with other health problems?

Yes, people with the following medical conditions often have depression, too:

- Heart disease or a history of stroke
- Diabetes
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (also called "COPD")
- Arthritis or other causes of ongoing pain
- Cancer
- Obesity

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## Does having a medical condition make people depressed or the other way around?

Nobody knows. For now, all that scientists can say for sure is that people with ongoing medical problems are more likely than healthy people to get depressed. Also, people with depression are more likely than nondepressed people to get certain medical conditions.

People with medical problems can get depressed because:

- They have physical limitations.
- They are afraid that they might die or have a health crisis, such as a heart attack.
- They have to spend a lot of time, energy, and sometimes money managing their illness.
- They have pain, trouble breathing, or other symptoms that make it hard to enjoy life.

Even worse, having depression makes it hard for people to do the things they need to do to manage their medical conditions. For example, depression can make it hard to:

- Remember to take your medicines or go to your doctor appointments.
  - Do physical activities or stay active, which is often recommended for better health and to overcome depression.
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## **How do I know if I am depressed?**

Depressed people feel down most of the time for at least 2 weeks. They also have at least 1 of these 2 symptoms:

- They no longer enjoy or care about the things that they used to like to do.
- They feel sad, down, hopeless, or cranky most of the day, almost every day.

Depression can also make you:

- Eat too much or not eat enough
- Sleep too much or too little
- Feel tired or like you have no energy
- Feel guilty or like you are worth nothing
- Forget things or feel confused
- Feel hopeless and think about death or suicide

If you think you might be depressed, see your doctor or nurse. Only someone trained in mental health can tell if you are depressed.

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## **What can I do if I have depression and another medical problem?**

First, do not assume that being depressed is a normal part of being sick. It's normal to be sad sometimes when you are sick, but depression is more serious and long-lasting than that. If you think you are depressed, tell your doctor or nurse, and look into treatment.

Also, make sure that all your doctors and nurses know about all your health problems, including your depression. That way, they know to keep all of those problems in mind when choosing treatment for you. If you have heart disease and need medicines for depression, for example, the doctor treating your depression will need to choose depression medicines that are safe for people with heart disease.

Finally, if you are having trouble dealing with your medical problem or depression, think about joining a support group for people with the same illness. Being part of a group can help you feel less alone. Plus, it can help you learn skills from other people who have been through what you are going through.

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## Get help right away if you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself!

Sometimes, people with depression think of hurting or killing themselves. If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself, help is available:

- In the US, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
  - To speak to someone, call or text **988**.
  - To talk to someone online, go to [www.988lifeline.org/chat](https://www.988lifeline.org/chat).
- Call your doctor or nurse and tell them that it is an emergency.
- **Call for an ambulance** (in the US and Canada, **call 9-1-1**).
- Go to the emergency department at your local hospital.

If you think your partner might have depression, or if you are worried that they might hurt themselves, get them help right away.

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## More on this topic

Patient education: Depression in adults (The Basics)

Patient education: Medicines for depression (The Basics)

Patient education: When you have multiple health problems (The Basics)

Patient education: Depression in adults (Beyond the Basics)

Patient education: Depression treatment options for adults (Beyond the Basics)

Patient education: Depression in children and adolescents (Beyond the Basics)

Patient education: Depression treatment options for children and adolescents (Beyond the Basics)

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