



UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION: YOU ARE NOT ALONE



University of Findlay

Office of Counseling Services

How to utilize this packet

Step 1: Read about what depression is and know that you are not alone in this experience.

Step 2: Educate yourself about some of the potential causes for depression. Along with, the difference between normal sadness and depression.

Step 3: Complete the depression symptom list and use the mood log to assist with tracking depression symptoms.

Step 4: Review what can be done to treat depression and use the coping skills to help manage depression.



University of Findlay

Office of Counseling Services

What is Depression?

Symptoms of a Depressive Episode

depressed mood	loss of interest or pleasure	significant weight change	diminished concentration
sleep difficulties	fatigue nearly every day	feelings of worthlessness	recurring thoughts of death

Symptoms must cause significant distress.

Symptoms must last for at least two weeks.

Demographics

- Women are 2x more likely to develop depression.
- About 1 in 10 people will experience depression during their lifetime.
- Most people experience their first depressive episode between ages 20 and 30.

Risks for Depression

- Family history of depression or similar disorders.
- Poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and other stressful life events.
- Regular drug and alcohol use.

Psychotherapy (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

CBT works by changing self-defeating thoughts and behaviors.

CBT has been found to be equally, if not more effective than medicine in many cases.

CBT is the most researched form of psychotherapy for depression.

Medication (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)

SSRIs increase the level of serotonin (a chemical related to depression) in the brain.

Studies suggest that SSRIs are the most effective when used to treat severe depression.

SSRIs don't work overnight—it might take up to 6 weeks before they reach their full effect.

A combination of both psychotherapy and medication has been found to be the most effective treatment for depression.

Other Facts

- Over ½ of those diagnosed with depression also suffer from anxiety.
- Physical exercise has been found to have a significant antidepressant effect.
- 60% of those who die by suicide suffer from depression or a related mood disorder.
- Depressive episodes also occur during bipolar disorder alongside manic episodes.

What causes Depression?

Depression is a mental health problem that comes from changes in your brain. The changes relate to how your brain produces and absorbs neurotransmitters, how it's circuits work, inflammation, and even how it's built (grey matter). These biological changes can start because you have a family history of depression, or it can start after changes and stressors in your life.

Some people feel depressed but don't understand why. Like there's nothing to be sad about but I feel so sad and I can't control these feelings. If you feel this way – it's possible you have a genetic predisposition to depression, that depression might run in your family, or that you have what professionals call “clinical depression.” There's no environmental explanation for it -but your brain is changing in a way that causes depression symptoms.

Other people feel depressed or sad after events and changes in their lives. It is totally normal to feel sad after bad things happen. Feeling grief after losing someone important is expected. Feeling sad during a breakup or changing schools is also expected. But if you feel depressed after a long period of time – even though things have gotten better – you might have clinical depression. This might have started with an event – but grew into something more.

Finally – if life is really hard, trauma and stress can cause depression. You may be bullied all the time, maybe home life is stressful and unhappy, or school sucks and doesn't get better. Even though it's expected that you should feel sad, these types of experiences put you at risk of having depression. It's especially hard if your situation hasn't changed and you don't know what life without sadness feels like.

Even though there are scientific explanations for what depression is. Trust your gut – if you feel like you're depressed, you know that you feel sad and the feeling is not what you want to feel. You can do something about that and getting better is totally possible.

What's the difference between sadness and depression?

Depression is about being sad, sure—but it's more than that. Depression is a mental illness that involves a lot of symptoms, like feeling exhausted all the time, losing interest in activities you normally enjoy, or thoughts of death and suicide. Episodes of depression last at least 2 weeks at a time. They can be triggered by a sad event or they can seemingly come out of nowhere.

How do I know if I'm sad or depressed?

If you're sad because you lost your job, are going through a breakup, or lost someone in your life... it's certainly no fun, but it's also pretty normal. Sadness, even extreme sadness, is a natural reaction to events like these. That said, regular sadness can also turn into depression. If the feelings don't get better over time, or if your mood starts to get in the way of your daily life, you might be developing a case of depression.

Physical changes can also affect your mood, like hormone changes due to puberty or certain medical treatments or conditions. If you think you might be depressed, it's a good idea to have a doctor review any medications you're taking and test your thyroid and other hormone levels.

Symptoms of Depression

Depression takes many forms, including ones that may not seem related to a depressed mood. Identifying your most troubling symptoms can help you focus on what you need to do to feel better.

This is a list of common symptoms of depression. Rate each symptom you are currently experiencing with a number from 0 to 3, where:

0 = never 1 = occasionally 2 = frequently 3 = most of the time

- _____ Trouble sleeping
- _____ Unhappiness
- _____ Constant feelings of sadness
- _____ Significant weight change
- _____ Reckless behavior
- _____ Drug or alcohol abuse
- _____ Feeling that nothing in your life is important or worthwhile
- _____ Withdrawal from friends and family
- _____ Feeling helpless
- _____ Feeling hopeless much of the time
- _____ Constant boredom
- _____ Skipping classes often
- _____ Fear of death
- _____ Increased irritability
- _____ No interest in activities that used to give you pleasure
- _____ Excessive use of drugs, alcohol, caffeine
- _____ Feeling worthless
- _____ Trouble focusing
- _____ Unexplained aches and pains
- _____ Desire to be alone
- _____ Irritation and anger
- _____ Difficulty making decisions
- _____ Negative attitude
- _____ Frequent crying
- _____ Strong feelings of guilt

- _____ Feeling like a failure
- _____ The desire to hurt yourself
- _____ Suicidal thoughts
- _____ Disappointment in yourself
- _____ Physical or verbal aggression toward others
- _____ Forgetfulness
- _____ Conflicts with family, friends, and/or coworkers
- _____ Withdrawal
- _____ A lack of interest in personal hygiene
- _____ Constant restlessness

1. Which of these symptoms do you feel affect you the most?

2. Describe anything else you have experienced that you think may be a symptom of depression.

3. When would you say you first started to have symptoms of depression?

4. What was going on in your life at that time?

Does Your Depression Physically Hurt?

Depression often hurts physically as well as emotionally. That’s because the same biochemicals that influence your mood also affect how your body interprets pain.

If you are experiencing any of the following health issues, it could be linked to your depression. It is important to address these physical symptoms, along with your depression.

- Headaches (for those who experience migraines, these may be worse)
- Back pain
- Muscle aches and joint pain
- Digestive problems (nausea, stomachache, diarrhea, constipation)
- Exhaustion and fatigue (regardless of sleep)
- Sleeping problems (insomnia or oversleeping)
- Change in appetite or weight
- Dizziness or lightheadedness

For the next week, keep track of any physical symptoms you experience, and rate each on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the worst.

Date and time	Symptom	First occurrence or recurring	Rating



MOOD MONITORING SHEET

Day	High & low mood ratings (0-10)	What events or activities were going on related to the highs and lows?
Monday	High: Low:	
Tuesday	High: Low:	
Wednesday	High: Low:	
Thursday	High: Low:	
Friday	High: Low:	
Saturday	High: Low:	
Sunday	High: Low:	

What can I do to help my depression?

For most people, some combination of lifestyle changes, therapy, medication, and support are helpful for treating depression. Some of these are more effective than others for certain people. It may take some time to discover what works for you, but it is worth it.

Lifestyle changes

Many habits can impact your mental health. Making sure you get regular sleep, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly can help a lot. Some people benefit from reducing or eliminating the use of caffeine, alcohol, or drugs. Meditation, yoga, and spiritual practices can be helpful as well. Pay attention to simple things, like taking time to take care of yourself, trying activities you enjoy, and spending time with people or environments where you feel supported.

Therapy

Therapy can be a great way to change behaviors, gain confidence, learn new skills, and talk with someone openly and honestly. There are many different types of therapy. Most therapists use multiple techniques, depending on the needs of the person they're working with. The most common type of therapy for depression is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). In CBT, a therapist helps you examine your thoughts and beliefs and how these influence your behavior.

Support

It's important to find support from others. This can come through family, friends, professionals, or support groups. Support groups are made up of individuals with similar experiences, who meet regularly to discuss their experiences. Talking to people who are going through the same things can make you feel less alone and more connected. It also creates a space where people can share what has worked for them and talk through their struggles with people who understand.

Medication

Another option is to take medications. Medications that treat depression are called antidepressants, and there are many different kinds. Medications affect everyone differently, so not every medication will work well for you, and many of them will have side-effects. You'll need to work with your doctor to find a medication that works for you. It's also common to take multiple medications, to target different symptoms or to counteract side-effects.

Coping Skills

Depression

Behavioral Activation

Depression saps a person's energy to do just about anything—even activities they enjoy. As a result, people with depression tend to become less active, which causes the depression to worsen. However, even a little bit of activity can help stop this cycle.

1. Choose activities you are likely to complete.

exercise	walk, go for a bike ride, weightlift, follow an exercise video, swim, practice yoga
socialize	call or text a friend, organize a group dinner, visit family, join a club / group
responsibilities	cleaning / housework, pay bills, professional development, homework
hobbies	sports, gardening, drawing, playing music, hiking, playing with a pet, cooking
personal care	dress up, get a haircut, prepare a healthy meal, tend to spiritual needs

2. Practice your chosen activities. Use the following tips to improve consistency.

start small	If needed, break activities into smaller pieces. Some activity is better than none.
make a plan	Set an alarm as a reminder, or tie an activity to something you already do. For example, practice a hobby immediately after dinner every day.
bring a friend	Including a friend will increase your commitment and make things more fun.

Social Support

Social isolation is a common symptom of depression. Related issues—such as fatigue, lowered self-esteem, and anxiety—exacerbate this problem. Resisting social isolation, and instead leaning on social support, can improve resilience to stress and depression.

- ✔ **Lean on your existing relationships.** Make it a priority to socialize with friends or family every day. If this is proving difficult, or if no one is nearby, plan times to interact remotely. Try cooking together on a video call, playing a game together, or sharing a coffee over the phone.
- ✔ **Say “yes” to socializing.** Depression makes it tempting to stay home, isolated from friends and family. Make a habit of saying “yes” to social opportunities, even when you’re tempted to stay in.
- ✔ **Join a support group.** Support groups let you connect with others who are dealing with issues similar to yours. You’ll benefit from sharing and receiving advice and support.

Coping Skills

Depression

Three Good Things

Negative thinking is a defining feature of depression. Positive experiences are minimized, while negative experiences are magnified. Gratitude helps combat this tendency by shifting focus toward *positive* experiences, rather than negative ones.

- 1 Write about three positive experiences from your day. These experiences can be small (“The weather was perfect when I walked to work”) or big (“I got a promotion at work”).

Choose one of the following questions to answer about each of the three good things:

- 2
 - Why did this happen?
 - Why was this good thing meaningful?
 - How can I experience more of this good thing?
- 3 Repeat this exercise every day for 1 week.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment. It means taking a step back and noticing the world, and one’s thoughts and feelings, without judgment. The goal of mindfulness is to simply *observe*. Mindfulness helps reduce the rumination and worry that often accompany depression.

One way to practice mindfulness is through meditation. During mindfulness meditation, you will simply sit and focus your attention on the sensation of breathing. By focusing on your breathing, you will put yourself in the here-and-now.

Time and Place

Find a quiet, comfortable place where you can practice mindfulness for 15 to 30 minutes every day. Frequent and consistent practice leads to the best results, but some practice is better than none.

Posture

Sit in a chair or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes or let your gaze soften. Let your head, shoulders, arms, and legs relax. Adjust your posture whenever you feel uncomfortable.

Awareness of Breath

Focus on your breathing. Notice the sensation of the air as it travels in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your belly.

Wandering Mind

During meditation, it’s normal for the mind to wander. When this happens, gently turn your attention back to your breathing. You may need to do this frequently throughout your practice.

Getting More Sleep Can Help Improve Your Mood

Do you have a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep? A lack of sleep will reduce the serotonin levels in your brain, which may make it harder to control your moods during the day. There are a variety of techniques that can help you get the sleep you need, but, of course, they only work if you are diligent at trying them and then using the ones that work best. Getting enough sleep is an important part of your overall plan to overcome your depression and is also important for your general health.

There are a variety of medications available to help you sleep, including prescription medication, herbs, and supplements, but always consult a physician before taking any kind of sleep aid.

Here are some other things you can try. On the chart on the next page, keep track of your sleep and the methods you use to sleep better. Track your progress for at least two weeks.

Techniques to Help You Get More Sleep

- Listen to soft music, read, take a warm shower, or meditate before going to bed.
- Exercise for at least a half-hour each day, but not before you go to bed.
- Write a to-do list for the following day and then clear your head of those concerns.
- Practice deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, either entirely or at least in the evenings.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature (65–68 degrees).
- If you are sensitive to light and sound, wear earplugs and a sleep mask or try a white-noise machine to mask the sound. There are various white-noise apps available if you have a smartphone.
- If you are having trouble falling asleep, get out of bed and do some light activity (like reading) in another room. Go back to bed when you feel drowsy.
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Avoid eating heavy meals for at least two to three hours before bed.
- Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable.
- Write down other ideas to help you get more sleep.

Sleep Diary

Date	Hours Slept	Trouble Sleeping?	Methods Tried	Successful?
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N