

Brighter Days

Issue 1: Signs, Symptoms and Causes of Depression

As a member filling a new prescription for antidepressant medication, you have been enrolled in WellFirst Health's Brighter Days program. As part of this program, you will receive six monthly newsletters to help you better understand your depression diagnosis and learn helpful ways to manage your mood.

Overview

More than 17 million U.S. adults – over 7% of the population – experience depression each year. People of all ages and all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds experience depression. Some will only experience one depressive episode in a lifetime, but it can reoccur. Without treatment, episodes may last a few months to several years, and can be devastating to those who have it and their families. Fortunately, with early detection, diagnosis and a treatment plan consisting of medication, psychotherapy and healthy lifestyle choices, most people get better.

Symptoms

Depression can present with different symptoms, depending on the person. But for most people, depressive disorder changes how they function day-to-day, and typically for more than two weeks. Common symptoms include:

- Significant low mood for more than two weeks
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of concentration
- Loss of energy
- Lack of interest in activities
- Hopelessness or guilty thoughts
- Changes in movement (less activity or agitation)
- Physical aches and pains
- Suicidal thoughts



Resources

WellFirst Health – Provided by SSM Health

For assistance in finding a behavioral health therapist or psychiatrist, call the Customer Care Center number on the back of your insurance card or use the “Find a Provider” feature on [wellfirsthealth.com](https://www.wellfirsthealth.com).

SSM Health also provides free phone education and resource coordination for members with complex, unstable behavioral health needs. To learn more, visit [wellfirsthealth.com](https://www.wellfirsthealth.com) or call our Customer Care Center.



We are here to help

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Causes

Depression does not have a single cause. It can be triggered by a life crisis, physical illness or something else—but it can also occur spontaneously. Scientists say several factors can contribute to depression:

- **Genetics.** A family history of depression increases the risk for developing the illness.
- **Life circumstances.** Difficult life events including divorce, financial problems, job loss or the death of a loved one can contribute to depression.
- **Biological.** People with depression may have too little or too much of certain brain chemicals called “neurotransmitters.” Changes in these brain chemicals may cause or contribute to depression.
- **Drug and alcohol misuse.** 21% of adults with a substance use disorder also experienced a major depressive episode in 2018. Co-occurring disorders require coordinated treatment for both conditions, as alcohol can worsen depressive symptoms.
- **Other medical conditions.** Depression is more likely to occur along with certain medical illnesses (like heart disease or diabetes), chronic pain, anxiety, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and drug and alcohol misuse.

“Baby Blues” Common but Manageable

Any woman who has gone through pregnancy or childbirth can develop anxiety or depression because of the many physical and emotional changes that occur during and after pregnancy. It’s common for many women to experience some level of emotional sadness or anxiety before or after childbirth. The emotions, commonly referred to as “Baby Blues,” are often temporary and typically fade away soon after childbirth.

However, feelings of sadness, anxiety and depression that last more than two weeks, and are more severe, are signs of postpartum depression (PPD). If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of PPD, seek help right away.

For more information, call WellFirst Health’s Strong Beginnings line at **608-830-5908**.

Other Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):
nami.org

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance:
dballiance.org

Anxiety and Depression Association of America:
adaa.org

▶ Next Month

Learn about the various treatment options available for depression and find what works for you.
