



## Do You Know the Facts? Breaking Down the Myths about Depression

Although depression affects 10 percent of Americans, there are still a number of misconceptions that exist.<sup>1</sup> Here are some common myths about depression and the real facts.

### 1. Myth: Depression doesn't affect *me*.

**Fact:** According to a 2004 survey by the American College Health Association, nearly half of all college students report feeling so depressed at some point in time that they have trouble functioning, and 15 percent meet the criteria for clinical depression. This means that someone in your life that you care about (or maybe yourself) could face depression at some point in college or in adulthood.

### 2. Myth: Depression is not a real medical problem.

**Fact:** Depression is a real and serious condition. It is no different than diabetes or heart disease in its ability to impact someone's life. It can have both emotional and physical symptoms and make life very difficult for those who have it. The medical community has acknowledged the seriousness of depression and recognizes it as a disease. While no one is completely certain what causes depression, we know that genetic and biological factors play a significant role in development of this disease.

### 3. Myth: Depression is something that strong people can "snap out of" by thinking positively.

**Fact:** No one chooses to be depressed, just like no one chooses to have any other health condition. People with depression cannot just "snap out of" their depression any more than someone with diabetes can. It is not a sign of weakness or laziness to be depressed; it is a health problem resulting from changes in brain structure or function due to environmental and biological factors.

### 4. Myth: Depression only happens when something bad happens in your life, such as a breakup, the death of a loved one, or failing an exam.

**Fact:** Depression is more than just having occasional sad thoughts. While everyone experiences ups and downs in life, and often will feel sad for some time after a serious loss or disappointment, developing depression does not require a specific negative event. Prolonged periods of hopelessness, sadness, and lack of interest in things someone usually enjoys are symptoms of depression. Depression can arise suddenly, even when things in life seem to be going well.





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## 5. Myth: Depression will just go away on its own.

**Fact:** While for some people, depression may go away without treatment, this is not usually the case. Without treatment, symptoms of depression can continue for weeks, months or even years. Depression can lead to suicide, the third leading cause of death for 18 to 24 year olds, reinforcing the importance of seeking treatment. The good news is that most people do get better with treatment.

## 6. Myth: Antidepressants will change your personality.

**Fact:** The thought of taking medicine that changes your brain chemistry can be scary. However, antidepressants are designed to change only certain chemicals that underlie the symptoms of depression, not to change your personality. Most people who take antidepressants are actually happy to feel like themselves again, rather than feeling like a different person. It is best to speak with your doctor about the effects that antidepressants can have.

## 7. Myth: Talking about depression only makes it worse.

**Fact:** While it is easy to understand why someone might be worried about discussing their depression, being alone with your thoughts is even more harmful when facing this disorder. A lot of people with mental health problems are stigmatized in our society, so the best thing you can do to help a friend is be a good, supportive, and non-judgmental listener if they choose to talk with you. If you are hesitant to discuss difficulties you might be facing with a close family member or friend, think about other people in your life, like spiritual leaders or faculty members who would be willing to discuss your struggles. If at any point, you feel so overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and hopelessness that you are considering hurting yourself, call 1-800-273-TALK for help.

**FACT: Depression is a serious illness, but most people get better with help.** To find out more about depression and where to get help, contact your local Mental Health America affiliate or call Mental Health America at 800-969-6642.

### Additional Resources

#### Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)

Phone: (800) 826 -3632  
<http://www.dbsalliance.org/>

#### National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Phone: (866) 615-6464  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

#### American Psychiatric Association (APA)

Phone: (703) 907-7300  
<http://healthyminds.org/cmhdepression.cfm>

#### Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Phone: (800)-789-2647  
<http://www.samhsa.gov/>  
<http://whatadifference.org/index.html>

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH):  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>



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