



Epilepsy & Depression Information & Treatment

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What are the treatment options for depression?

Depression is treatable. Psychotherapy and medication are the most common ways to treat depression.

- **Psychotherapy:** Mental health professionals use psychotherapy to help people learn coping skills, notice thought patterns, and enact behavioral changes. It is also called talk therapy or counseling.
- **Medication:** Antidepressants are the most common type of medication used to treat depression. They can help improve mood by stabilizing neurotransmitters in the brain.

Psychotherapy and medication can be used separately or together. Talk with your provider to determine what plan is best for you.



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What is depression?

Sadness is a normal response to life difficulties, challenges, and frustrations, like the death of a loved one, or the loss of a job.

Depression, however, involves persistent, intense periods of clear changes in mood, thinking, and motivation. Some people will only experience one episode of depression in their lifetime, but for most, the depression recurs. Depression can last for years and negatively impact people's quality of life. With early treatment, many will experience improved well-being.

Depression is common in people with epilepsy. For example, about 33% of (or 1 in 3) people with epilepsy experience symptoms of depression, and that number may increase to 50% (or 1 in 2) for people with uncontrolled seizures who are treated at epilepsy centers.

There are multiple forms of depression. The most common types include major depressive disorder and persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia).

What are the causes of depression?

Depression does not have a single cause. Research has identified several possible contributing factors including; a trauma or crisis, genetics, life circumstances, drug and alcohol misuse, brain changes, and other medical conditions.

For some people with epilepsy, depression may have been diagnosed prior to epilepsy. For others, it may be related to epilepsy-specific stressors such as employment challenges, learning difficulties, social stigma, fear of seizures, and limitations (such as driving restrictions).



Can AEDs affect depression?

Anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) have the potential to have positive or negative effects on mood. Some AEDs are used to treat depression. Others may trigger negative effects instead.

AEDs are more likely to contribute to feelings of depression in people with prior history or family history of depression, anxiety, or alcoholism.

Two people may experience different effects from the same medication. Talk with your provider to learn about how your medications may affect mood.



Major depressive disorder:

Major depressive disorder includes some of the symptoms below, present during a 2 week period and represent a change in previous functioning.

- Depressed mood most of the day every day
- Reduced interest/enjoyment of most activities
- Significant weight or appetite change
- Sleep disturbance
- Physical slowing or agitation
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Persistent feelings of worthlessness
- Reduced concentration
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Symptoms interfere with daily functioning at home, work, or school.

Persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia):

The main feature of persistent depressive disorder is a depressed mood for most of the day, more days than not, for at least 2 years.

Additional symptoms may include:

- Poor appetite/overeating
- Sleep disturbance
- Low energy or fatigue
- Poor concentration or decision making difficulty
- Feelings of hopelessness

Symptoms interfere with daily functioning at home, work, or school.