What is depression?

Depression is an illness that affects the whole person – body, mind, and spirit. Symptoms are both mental and physical.

It is a medical condition that can be treated.

What causes depression?

Like other medical problems, depression can have a number of causes, both psychological and biological.

Some biological stresses that can bring on depression include:

- Medical illness
- Certain prescription drugs
- Alcohol
- Street drugs

Psychological stresses that can bring on depression include:

- Loss
- Major life changes (positive ones as well as negative ones)

Some people inherit a tendency to depression. Depression can come on for no known reason. Whatever its cause, depression leads to changes in your normal brain chemistry, your feelings, and your behavior.

Am I depressed?

These can all be symptoms of depression:

- Feeling down, blue, hopeless, sad, or irritable.
- No longer feeling pleasure when you do things that would usually be fun.
- Having low self-esteem ("I'm not a competent person"), negative thinking ("I'll never feel better"), and trouble concentrating.
- Feeling less energy.
- Seeing changes in your appetite, weight, sleeping patterns, or having more physical pain.
- Feeling bad enough that you are having trouble doing your normal activities at work or at home.

Depression can come on slowly over time, or an event can trigger it.

Answer the following 3 questions to see if you may be depressed:

	YES	NO
Do you have some or all of the symptoms listed above?	☐	☐
Have you had them for 2 weeks or more?	☐	☐
Are they getting in the way of your normal life at home, school, or work?	☐	☐

If you answer "Yes" to these questions, it is time to get help. Call your health care provider or Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services to make an appointment.

Sometimes we can see signs of depression in others more easily than we can see them in ourselves. If you have friends or family who show these signs, encourage them to get outside help.

About depression

Most people will have signs of depression at some time in their lives. It can be a minor illness that lasts a short time and goes away by itself. It can be a major illness that severely limits how you function. Depression can be treated!

There are many tools to treat people and help them get better faster. Most people will get better with treatment.

Be aware of the signs so you can recognize them in yourself or in a friend and get help early.

What kinds of treatment are there for depression?

First, talk to your health care team. They will evaluate your condition and work with you to decide which treatments might be best for you.

We recommend the Self-Care Program for anyone who has stress or depression. Our workbook, *Understanding and Managing Your Depression*, describes the program.

You can take some of the positive steps from the Self-Care Program right away:

- Push yourself to do things you like to do.
- Seek support from other people.
- Identify and challenge your negative thoughts.
- Get some physical activity every day.
- Break big problems down into smaller pieces that you can manage.

Self-care might be all you need.

For more severe depression Kaiser Permanente offers two treatments: counseling and/or antidepressant medicines.

Counseling

Counseling will help mild to moderate depression. This treatment helps you work toward solutions. Counseling is available as one-to-one therapy or as group therapy.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy works best for depression. It:

- Helps you re-gain your energy.
- Helps you move forward.
- Teaches you new skills to lower your risk of getting depressed again.

Drugs

Drugs to treat depression are called anti-depressants. They are not addictive nor do they change your personality. They work by re-balancing the chemistry in your brain. They help you feel like your non-depressed self. They can help you:

- Sleep better.
- Have more energy.
- Enjoy activities again.
- Reduce negative thoughts.
- Reduce anxiety and fatigue.
- Improve your appetite.

If antidepressants are prescribed for you, your provider will work with you to find the one that works best with the fewest side effects.

What can I do?

Your very first step is to ask for help. This can be the hardest step you take. It also is the most important.

Call your health care provider or a Kaiser Permanente behavioral consultant to make an appointment.

You can begin some steps from the Self-Care Program outlined on the inside of this pamphlet right away.

Call your health care provider or Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services for the booklet, *Understanding and Managing Your Depression*. It provides a more complete look at depression and gives examples of others who have been depressed. It also is a workbook for self-care.

Resources

- If you have signs of depression, call your primary health care provider or Kaiser Permanente Behavioral Health Services to make an appointment at 1-888-287-2680.
- For medical questions after clinic hours call the Consulting Nurse Service available to Kaiser Permanente members 24 hours a day, 7 days a week: 1-800-297-6877.
- Visit the Kaiser Permanente website at kp.org/wa.

Coverage, rates, and access may vary based on what you and/or your employer have purchased and your location. Check your benefit booklet or call Member Services at 1-888-901-4636.

This information is not intended to replace the advice of your health care provider.

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Depression

The basics: What you need to know

- Causes
- Symptoms
- Treatments

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