



Depression

Janet M. Torpy; Alison E. Burke; Richard M. Glass

Online article and related content
current as of August 28, 2008.

JAMA. 2008;299(20):2466 (doi:10.1001/jama.299.20.2466)

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/299/20/2466>

Supplementary material

Spanish PDF

<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/299/20/2466/DC1>

Correction

[Contact me if this article is corrected.](#)

Citations

[Contact me when this article is cited.](#)

Topic collections

JAMA Patient Page; Psychiatry; Depression

[Contact me when new articles are published in these topic areas.](#)

Related Articles published in
the same issue

Escitalopram and Problem-Solving Therapy for Prevention of Poststroke
Depression: A Randomized Controlled Trial

[Robert G. Robinson et al. *JAMA*. 2008;299\(20\):2391.](#)

Subscribe

<http://jama.com/subscribe>

Email Alerts

<http://jamaarchives.com/alerts>

Permissions

permissions@ama-assn.org

<http://pubs.ama-assn.org/misc/permissions.dtl>

Reprints/E-prints

reprints@ama-assn.org

Depression

A person who feels sad all the time, has unexplained crying spells, or loses interest in usual activities may have major depression, a serious medical illness that should be distinguished from normal temporary feelings of sadness after a loss, such as the death of a relative or friend. The May 28, 2008, issue of *JAMA* includes a study about preventing depression in patients who have had a stroke. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the January 18, 2006, issue of *JAMA*.



SYMPTOMS OF MAJOR DEPRESSION

Having at least 5 of these symptoms occurring nearly every day for at least 2 weeks:

- Feeling sad or empty
- Decreased interest or pleasure in activities
- Appetite change with weight loss or weight gain
- Decreased or increased sleeping
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Being either agitated or slowed down
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

OTHER TYPES OF DEPRESSION

- **Bipolar disorder** (previously called **manic-depressive disorder**)—occurrence of episodes of major depression and episodes of abnormally elevated mood called mania (severe) or hypomania (less severe)
- **Dysthymia**—mild depression symptoms lasting for at least 2 years
- **Postpartum depression**—a mother's depression occurring after the birth of her baby
- **Seasonal affective disorder**—major depression occurring regularly in seasons with low sunlight

TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION

- **Medications**—Several types of antidepressant medications have been shown to be effective for depression, but they must be taken for several weeks before they begin to work.
- **Psychotherapy**—Several kinds of “talking therapies” have also been shown to be effective for depression. They involve evaluating and changing the thoughts, attitudes, and relationship problems that are associated with depression.
- **Bright light**—Daily exposure to bright light can be helpful for seasonal depression.
- **Electroconvulsive therapy**—A series of treatments involving passage of electric current through the brain while the patient is under anesthesia can often relieve even severe depression. These treatments are usually given about 3 times per week for several weeks.

Anyone who is experiencing symptoms of depression should be evaluated by a doctor. Although individuals with depression often feel that nothing can help them, effective treatments are available. Evaluation and treatment are particularly important to prevent suicide. Depression is the most common cause of suicide.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Psychiatric Association
www.psych.org
- National Mental Health Association
www.depression-screening.org
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
www.dbsalliance.org
- National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on *JAMA*'s Web site at www.jama.com. Many are available in English and Spanish. The following related Patient Pages have been previously published: one on suicide in the May 25, 2005, issue; one on postpartum depression in the February 13, 2002, issue; one on electroconvulsive therapy in the March 14, 2001, issue; one on adolescent suicide in the December 26, 2001, issue; and one on psychiatric illness in older adults in the June 7, 2000, issue.

Sources: American Psychiatric Association, National Institute of Mental Health, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, National Mental Health Association

Janet M. Torpy, MD, Writer

Alison E. Burke, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

The JAMA Patient Page is a public service of *JAMA*. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal medical condition, *JAMA* suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. To purchase bulk reprints, call 312/464-0776.

