

Navigating Depression: What You Need to Know About Diagnosis and Treatment

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Depression is an illness that affects many of us but often goes unnoticed. The initial stride in discovering the proper treatment is unraveling the mystery of what's happening. It's like solving a puzzle, and the pieces include a physical and psychological evaluation. Evaluation helps your doctor determine if you're dealing with depression and, if so, what type. Some medications and medical conditions can mimic the symptoms, so ruling out other medical illnesses, conditions, and side effects as "culprits" is crucial.

Diagnosis: Unveiling the Mystery

An excellent diagnostic evaluation is like digging into the history of your feelings. Your doctor or mental health professional will want to know your symptoms, when they started, how long they've been hanging around, and how intense they are. Questions like: "How long have you been feeling like this?" "Have you felt this way before?" "If yes, what treatment did you receive, and did it help?" are typical. Your doctor or therapists will also dive into your lifestyle, asking about alcohol and drug use and whether thoughts of death or suicide are on your mind. Your family history is important for diagnosis, too. Knowing if others in your family have experienced depression and what treatments worked for them provides valuable insights.

Identifying Your Symptoms:

How do you know if you are depressed? Symptoms occur most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks. Frequency and length of

symptoms are part of the diagnostic criteria. Diagnostic symptom criteria include the following:

- Persistent feelings of melancholy, a sense of emptiness, or a prevailing sense of hopelessness.
-
- Tearfulness.
-
- Irritability, frustration intolerance, temper, or angry outbursts.
-
- Diminished enjoyment or interest in activities typically found pleasurable.
-
- Sleeping difficulties encompass challenges in falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or experiencing excessive sleep.
-
- Feelings of weariness, fatigue, and a noticeable lack of energy.

- Change in appetite and weight.

- Feelings of anxiety, restlessness, or agitation.

- Thoughts, speech, or physical movements experience a noticeable slowdown.

- Experiencing a sense of worthlessness or guilt.

- Excessive focus on failure or self-blame.

- Trouble focusing, concentrating, and paying attention.

- Difficulty with making decisions and short-term memory.

- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide, including instances of suicidal attempts.

- Persistent, unexplained physical ailments like back pain, cramps, digestive issues, or headaches that are not alleviated despite treatment efforts.

If you experience several of these symptoms, even if not all, you can undergo an assessment for depression. For many people, the symptoms of depression are usually bad enough to impair functioning in day-to-day activities, such as work, school, social activities, or relationships with others. However, some people may feel a more general malaise with symptoms creating a sense of misery or unexplained unhappiness.

Treatment Options: Tailoring Solutions

After evaluation and diagnosis, you and your provider will discuss treatment options. The good news is there are various options, including antidepressant medications and psychotherapies. What works for one person might not be the best fit for another. Some find relief with psychotherapy, others with medication, and some with a combination of both. It's like choosing the right tools for the job.

Medications: Finding the Right One

There is a wide assortment of antidepressant medications, including tricyclics, monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs). Sometimes, finding the right antidepressant takes on the aspects of a series of trial and error experiments where you and your doctor assess effectiveness and make changes together. Sticking to the prescribed dosage is essential—even if you start feeling better. Please don't adjust your medication without your physician's approval, and please don't stop taking it abruptly. It's not safe to do that. Missing doses for a day or two can impact your mood and mental health. Although tapering off an antidepressant may be necessary, it does not equate to addiction. Communication with your provider is essential. Discuss any side effects or questions with your doctor. Some side effects, like dry mouth or

constipation, are temporary and manageable, while others might need a closer look.

Psychotherapies:

Psychotherapy is an effective way to tackle depression. There are different types of therapy and therapists. As a medical professional, a psychiatrist holds the authority to prescribe medications. Some psychiatrists provide psychotherapy. There are psychologists, marriage and family therapists, social workers, addiction counselors, and professional counselors. Any of these professionals could be treating your depression, along with the other issues causing problems in your life. Counseling consists of individual, group, and family sessions. You'll create a treatment plan with your therapist to serve as a roadmap for your therapy. There are several different psychotherapeutic approaches involving different philosophies and assumptions. The most popular are listed here:

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Focuses on identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors.
- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT):** Concentrates on improving interpersonal relationships and addressing communication patterns.
- **Psychodynamic Therapy:** Uncovers unconscious thoughts and past experiences to understand and address current issues.
- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT):** Integrates cognitive-behavioral techniques with mindfulness to manage emotions and improve interpersonal effectiveness.
- **Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT):** Combines mindfulness meditation with cognitive-behavioral strategies to prevent relapses in depression.
- **Humanistic Therapy:** Emphasizes personal growth, self-actualization, and the exploration of feelings and emotions.

- **Narrative Therapy:** Focuses on reshaping personal narratives and stories to promote positive change.
- **Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT):** Concentrates on finding solutions in the present rather than delving into the past.
- **Behavioral Therapy:** Targets specific behaviors and aims to modify them through reinforcement or conditioning.
- **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR):** Involves guided eye movements to process distressing memories.
- **Family Therapy:** Involves working with family systems to improve communication and resolve conflicts.
- **Group Therapy:** Conducted in a group setting, offering mutual support, shared experiences, and interpersonal learning.
- **Art Therapy:** Utilizes artistic expression as a means of communication and self-exploration.
- **Play Therapy:** Primarily for children, this uses play as a medium for expression and problem-solving.

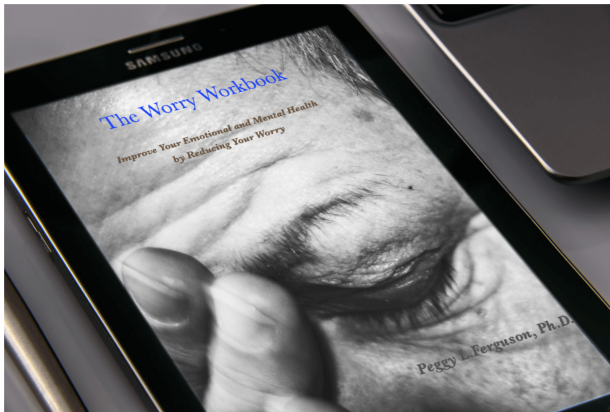
Existential Therapy: Explores philosophical aspects of life, meaning, and personal responsibility.

The symptoms and living problems that people with depression unique needs and specific preferences of the person seeking therapy. Many psychotherapists take an integrative approach, drawing from several therapies to tailor treatment to a patient's needs.

Final Thoughts:

Recovery from depression is like embarking on a journey. It might take a bit of exploration, but the destination is worth it. Whether it's medication,

therapy, or a mix of both, there's a path to recovery. And remember, reaching out to your doctor and your therapist when you have questions or concerns is a crucial part of the process. Depression can be resolved. For some people, reduction of symptoms and manageability with the correct tools and support is the goal. Regardless of your goals, you can feel better with a little help.



[\\$4.95](#)

The Worry Workbook By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Many people with depression are aware they experience elevated anxiety and engage in a lot of worry, which further exacerbates their depression—introducing "The Worry Workbook," a companion resource to regain control over your life. This simple E-Workbook provides actionable insights and hands-on resources to take control of your worry. The workbook goes beyond the cognitive and emotional components, encouraging you to explore lifestyle factors, sources of your worries, and solutions to stressors. It fosters self-reflection, guides the development of awareness, and empowers you to root out the sources of your concerns and to replace needless worry with problem-solving.

"The Worry Workbook" is not just a book; it's a guide that empowers you to take charge of your anxiety and apprehension to embark on a contented, more fulfilling life.