

Depression is...

...how you act:

- Tendency to isolate socially
- Decreased physical activity
- Not engaging in things that were once fun/enjoyable or interesting.
- Argumentative
- Avoidant/overly protective

...how your body reacts:

- Difficulty falling or staying asleep
- Poor or excessive appetite
- Fatigue

...how you think:

- Hopelessness
- Persistent negative thoughts about yourself, the world, or your future
- Low "self-esteem"
- Pessimism
- Suicidal thinking
- Worried thoughts

...how you feel:

- Sad
- Guilt/shame
- Low motivation
- Numb or that "nothing matters"
- Anxious/worried
- Irritable
- Lack of ability to enjoy things ("anhedonia")



Everyone feels blue or sad sometimes. In fact, it's normal to have a bad day every once in a while, shed tears after a sad movie, or feel nervous before a big day and lose sleep. These are common human experiences that are a healthy and normal part of life.

However, when the elements listed above last for days, weeks, or longer, we may be suffering from an episode of **Major Depressive Disorder**, also called "depression." A person is typically diagnosed with depression when they experience periods of two weeks or more at a time where they feel low mood, lack of enjoyment or pleasure, poor self-esteem (feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt), changes in sleep and appetite, and social isolation.

What causes depression?

Do I have a "chemical imbalance?"



Doctors and psychologists (as well as therapists, philosophers, and theologians, among others) have been making efforts to understand the underlying causes of depression since ancient times. Since the middle of the 20th century, we have made many important advances in understanding depression, one of which was the discovery that certain important brain chemicals are "out of balance" for those people that are depressed. This led to one very important advance in depression treatment, the advent of antidepressant medications such as Prozac. It was common for patients in the 1980's to be told that they had a "chemical imbalance" that was causing their depression.

While this is true to some extent, since then we have learned through further research that the "cause" of depression is more complicated, involving many elements, influenced by both "nature" and "nurture." Some of those factors are listed below.

Nature



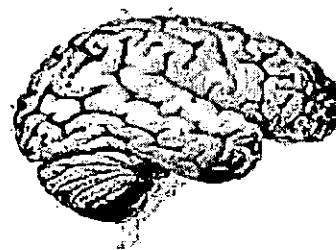
Genetics: Inherited vulnerability to physical and/or mental illness.

Chemical imbalance: Imbalance of important brain chemicals called "neurotransmitters."

Hormones: Imbalances due to puberty, pregnancy/postpartum, menopause, adrenal, thyroid, and pituitary disorders.

and

Nurture



Early life experiences: Patterns of attachment with parents, early life stress, and trauma.

Modeling from important elders/authority figures: Learned behaviors from others in your life that might have been depressed or anxious. Learned thoughts about the world and self.

Major life changes: Moving a lot growing up, stressful jobs, change in health status, divorce, and loss of family members or significant people.

Depression: *System-Wide Crash*

Depression is not who you are. Depression is like a blanket or mask that hides your real personality.

Depression is not your fault; it is not because you are weak, or a "loser." Depression is an illness, with symptoms like any other illness.

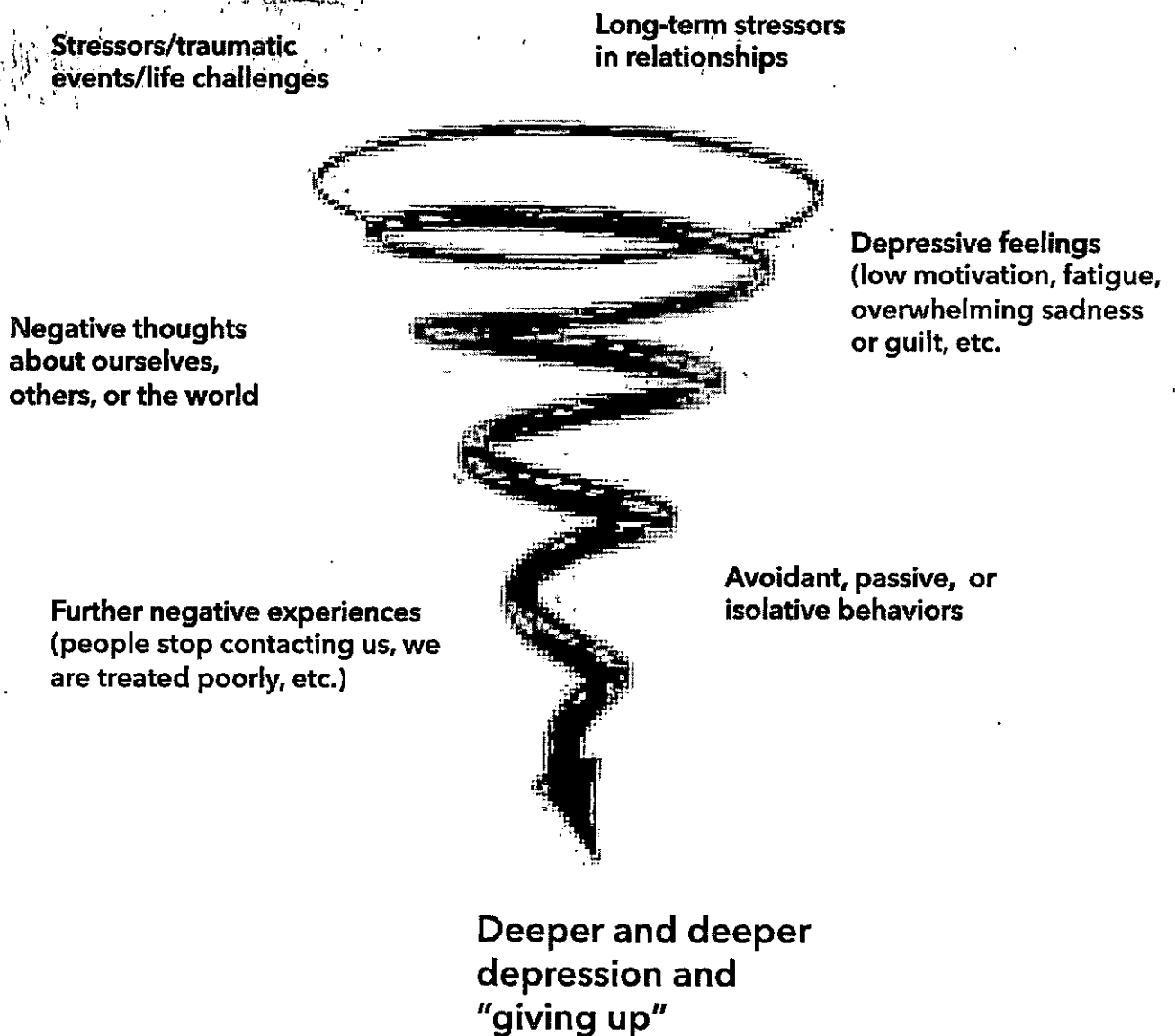
These are some of the common symptoms of depression. Circle the symptoms that apply to you.

BODY	BEHAVIOUR	MIND	EMOTIONS
• No energy • Sleep changes • Appetite changes • Weight changes • Stomach problems • No sexual interest • Lump in throat • Tense muscles • Diarrhea • Constipation • Feel weighed down • Pain	• Agitated, restless • Cry at least thing • Can't start things • Social withdrawal • Can't finish things • Clumsy • Slowed down • Snap at people • Frantically busy • Do nothing • Stop hobbies, etc.	• Easily distracted • Poor memory • Can't think clearly • Body image worry • Can't make decisions • Slowed thinking • Racing thoughts • Spaced out • Obsessive thinking • Self-critical • Negative focus • Worrying • Suicidal thoughts	• Depressed, down • Anxious, scared • Hopeless • Numb • Discouraged • Worthless, inadequate • Ashamed, guilty • Can't feel pleasure • Helpless • Lost • Frustrated • Alone

The Depression "Downward Spiral"

Regardless of the "cause" of depression for you (see the previous section: "What causes depression?"), once it starts, it often causes a "downward spiral" that leads to increasingly bad feelings and further negative events.

For example, isolating socially may cause others to stop reaching out to us and relationships may dissolve. Or, our poor view of ourselves may come across to others as low confidence and people may stop respecting us or treat us poorly.



This cycle may take many forms. Use the next page to better understand your own depression "downward spiral."



My Depression "Downward Spiral"

List some of the factors in each category below and think about how one factor may influence the others.

**Stressors/traumatic events/
life challenges**

**Long-term stressors in
relationships**

**Negative thoughts about
ourselves, others, or the world**

Depressive feelings
(low motivation, fatigue, over-
whelming sadness or guilt, etc.)



Further negative experiences
(people stop contacting us, we
are treated poorly, etc.)

**Avoidant, passive, or isolative
behaviors**

Deeper and deeper depression and "giving up?"