

Depression

Reference Guide



What is Depression?

- Depression is a common and serious mental illness that impacts a person's mind, behavior and physical health.¹ It can lead to or exacerbate a variety of emotional and physical problems that interfere with a person's daily functioning and reduce the overall quality of life.³ Depression has been linked with other chronic health problems including but not limited to anxiety, substance abuse, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, cancer and diabetes.⁴
- Dealing with more than one health problem at a time can be difficult, so proper treatment is important. Signs of depression can often be vague or generalized to other chronic health problems making it easy to overlook in a routine office visit. More than half of outpatient medical visits are for somatic complaints which are often associated with depression or anxiety and patients will answer questions about the presence of depressive or anxious symptoms if asked.⁵

Symptoms

The following are considered common symptoms of depression and should lead a Primary Care Physician completing a preliminary depression screening at the time of the visit.

- **Adults**
 - Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
 - Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
 - Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
 - Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
 - Decreased energy, fatigue or being "slowed down"
 - Difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions
 - Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening or oversleeping
 - Appetite and/or weight changes
 - Thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts
 - Restlessness, irritability
 - Persistent physical symptoms⁶
- **Children and Teens**
 - Feeling sad, hopeless, or irritable a lot of the time
 - Aches and pains
 - Not wanting to do or enjoy doing fun things
 - Refusing to go to school
 - Changes in eating patterns
 - Changes in sleep patterns
 - Changes in energy
 - Having a hard time paying attention
 - Feeling worthless, useless, or guilty
 - Anger
 - Avoidance of social interaction
 - Self-injury and self-destructive behavior^{3,7}

Screening Tools

- Simple general screening tools that can be completed by the patient or administered during the office visit include:
 - **Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire – Child Self Report and Parent Report on Child (SMFQ-C, SMFQ-P)** is designed for children and young people aged 8-17 years. It has a parent and a child form that assesses depression symptoms in children. The tool does not have a single cut point indicating depression but lets the user decide what will be most useful in their particular circumstance.^{9,10}
 - **The Patient Health Questionnaire 2 and 9 (PHQ2, PHQ9)** is a simple screening tool utilized in a primary care setting if a patient exhibits any signs or symptoms of depression. Patients who screen positive on the first two questions should be further evaluated with the remaining questions to confirm a positive result.⁸
 - **The Postnatal Edinburgh Depression Scale (EPDS)** is a 10-item, self-report measure designed to screen women for symptoms of depression and anxiety during pregnancy and the postnatal period.¹¹
- Analysis of the National Ambulatory Medical Care Survey reveals that despite the high prevalence of depression in primary care (13 to 16 percent of adults experiencing symptoms of depression in their lifetime and 4 to 8 percent experiencing major depression in a given year), screening was low at 4.2 percent. This signifies missed opportunities to identify patients with depression and link them to appropriate care.¹²

Interventions

- Interventions for the treatment of depression falls into two main categories: psychosocial and pharmacological interventions.
 - Psychosocial interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Interpersonal Therapy, Problem-Solving Therapy and Computer and/or Internet-Based Therapies can be useful.
 - Pharmacological interventions include, most often, prescribing antidepressants such as Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), Serotonin and Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs), Tricyclic (TCAs) or Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs). Patients on antidepressants need to follow physician directions to help ensure an effective medication is being taken and for the appropriate length of time. Other helpful actions patients can take include joining a support group, being active, exercising, setting realistic goals, spending time with others, postponing important decisions, expecting one's mood to improve gradually, thinking positively and continuing to educate oneself about depression.⁶

Resources

For additional information about Depression, screening tools, interventions and resources, please visit:

- SuperiorHealthPlan.com
- ADAA.org
- CDC.gov
- NIMH.nih.gov
- NAMI.org
- Psychiatry.org

References

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