

[Home](#) >> [Patients & Families](#) >> [Diseases & Conditions](#) >> [Depression](#)

# Depression

## Signs of depression

Depression strikes one in four women and one in eight men sometime during their lifetimes. Yet two out of three of them don't get treatment. Are you one of them? You might be depressed if you feel:

- Tired all the time
- Sad most of the time
- Guilty
- Worthless
- Unable to think clearly or make decisions
- Hungry all the time

## Or if you have:

- No enjoyment in what used to be fun
- Repeated thoughts of death or suicide
- No appetite
- Trouble sleeping (too little or too much)

If you notice any of these in your daily life, tell your doctor of internal medicine (internist). The problems could stem from depression or other illnesses. Your internist will determine which.

## A common illness - not a personal weakness

If you think you're depressed, here's what you should know: At least 20 million American adults suffer from depression, and it is on the rise — especially among the elderly. Depression can come from chemical imbalances in the brain, hormonal changes, medications, or things going on in your life. It is not a passing blue mood that can be wished away. Your internist can help you find out why you are feeling this way.

## A treatable illness

If you think you or a family member might be depressed, ask your internist about it. There are many effective antidepressant medications — old and new — nowadays. Should you need one of them, you and your internist will team up to choose the best medication for you.

## What you need to know about antidepressant medication:

Tell your internist about any store-bought medications or herbal products you are taking

Take your prescribed pills daily

Most pills take 3-4 weeks to take effect

Continue your pills even when feeling better

Some pills require regular blood checks

Do not stop the pills without checking with your internist

Ask your internist if you have any questions about your treatment

In addition to antidepressant medication, your internist might also refer you to a psychotherapist.

## St. John's Wort: The jury's still out

St. John's Wort, an herbal product, has attracted a lot of attention for its antidepressant potential. It appears to be somewhat effective, at least in the short-term, and only for mild to moderate depression.

The evidence of its effectiveness is limited. Most of the studies were done in Europe, where studies are based on preparations that may not be the same as what is being sold in the United States. The FDA does *not* standardize or verify ingredients of herbal products.

**Caution:** If you are taking St. John's Wort, be sure to tell your internist. It can reduce the effect of certain prescription medications unrelated to depression or cause adverse drug interactions.

## Downloadable Information

(Note: the following items are PDF files — a free copy of [Adobe Acrobat](#) is needed to view them.)

*Celebrating Life: A [Guide to Depression](#) for African Americans* booklet.

Download a [brochure](#) containing the information on this page.

[A Guide to Bipolar Disorder](#)

["Depression: A Guide for Latinos"](#) (English and Spanish language)

[Depression: A Guide for Older Americans](#)

## **Annals of Internal Medicine Patient Summaries**

Search for **depression** in ACP's [Annals of Internal Medicine Patient Summaries](#). *Annals of Internal Medicine* is the leading peer-reviewed internal medicine clinical journal.

[Careers at ACP](#) · [Contact Us](#) · [Privacy](#) · [Site Map](#) · [For Advertisers](#) · [For Media](#) · [For Governors](#) · [For Regents](#)

© Copyright 2010 American College of Physicians. All Rights Reserved.  
190 North Independence Mall West, Philadelphia, PA 19106-1572  
Toll Free: (800) 523.1546 · Local: (215) 351.2400