

Depression

Treat it as if your life depended on it.

Fact Sheet

Myths vs. Facts about Suicide and Depression

MYTH: Depression isn't really an illness.

FACT: The brain is an organ of the body that can get sick just like the heart, liver or kidneys. Chemicals in the brain, called neurotransmitters, regulate how people think, feel and act. The brain can get sick if these chemicals are out of balance or get disrupted, and the illness called clinical depression can result.

MYTH: All people who have depression appear to be sad.

FACT: There are many different symptoms associated with depression; sadness is only one of them. Some people have chronic anger, worry, panic or anxiety. Many hide their feelings of despair and smile to mask their pain.

MYTH: People with depression are weak and should be able to snap themselves out of it.

FACT: Depression doesn't have anything to do with a person's character or willpower. It is an illness that people can't talk themselves out of, just like people can't talk themselves out of having diabetes or heart disease. Treatment is the best way to stop depression.

MYTH: Something bad has to happen to people in order for them to get depression.

FACT: Depression can happen at any time, even when a person's life is going well. Stressful events can trigger or exacerbate depression, but anyone can get depression regardless of age, race, economic status, or environment. One in four Americans will have a depressive illness at some time in their lives.

MYTH: Most people with depression can't be helped.

FACT: Depression can be effectively treated in 90 percent of cases with a combination of medication and therapy. Unfortunately, only 1 in 3 people with depression will get help.

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MYTH: Depression is something to be ashamed of and you shouldn't talk about it with others.

FACT : People aren't ashamed of having other illnesses, like heart disease or diabetes; they shouldn't be embarrassed about having depression either. *If depression is discussed more openly, more people will recognize symptoms, understand treatment options, and realize it's a serious illness. Shame and stigma are the main reasons people don't get the help they need.*

MYTH: Depression isn't really serious.

FACT: Depression is a serious illness that can be deadly. *Experts estimate that at least 70 percent of suicides are a result of untreated depression. Untreated depression in adults can also lead to unemployment, financial problems, divorce, or substance abuse. In young people, it can cause problems at home, in school, and with friendships.*

MYTH: Asking someone, "Have you ever felt so badly that you've thought about suicide?" will plant the idea in a person's head and possibly cause a suicide attempt.

FACT: Suicidal thoughts (in varying degrees) can be a symptom of depression. *Most people, when asked, will be truthful about their feelings and will be relieved to know someone cares enough to ask and assist them in getting help. Asking people about suicidal thoughts or plans can help save lives.*

MYTH: Suicides usually happen without warning.

FACT: Studies show that about 80 percent of people who attempt or complete suicide will either hint at it or directly tell a friend or relative about plans for suicide. *They may also make statements about feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless. Warning signs may also include: suddenly becoming happier or calmer, visiting or calling loved ones to say goodbye, self-destructive behaviors, setting affairs in order, or giving things away.*

MYTH: You should keep quiet about a suicide plan, if someone asks you to keep it a secret.

FACT: Never keep a suicide plan a secret. *When young people are concerned about a friend or relative, they should tell an adult. Adults who are concerned about a friend or family member should build a support system and guide the person to a medical professional for a depression evaluation and suicide assessment.*