

When to See a Doctor

It is important to keep in mind that some of depression's symptoms are also characteristics of physical diseases. Several years ago, I knew a man who described low mood, exhaustion, weight loss, and marital strife. He had a history of depressive episodes, but the rapid weight loss and his general out-of-sorts feeling suggested that his problem might be something other than depression or marital strife. A physical examination revealed that he had cancer and needed immediate surgery. After his recovery, the depressive symptoms vanished. Not the marital strife, however. After several sessions of marriage counseling, he and his wife began to achieve a more mutually satisfying relationship.

***Important
point!***

If you have any symptoms of depression, you need to have a thorough medical examination and tell the doctor your symptoms. Most likely you do not have a physical illness, but you *must* check it out. If you feel too shy or embarrassed to talk about your depression, get someone to do it for you or write it down on a piece of paper and hand it to your doctor.

Take This Quiz before Moving On

Here is a quick checklist that you can use to find out if you or your loved one has symptoms of depression. It is very important to remember that this checklist is a preliminary screening test only. It is intended solely for the purpose of identifying the symptoms of depressive disorders, and not to provide a diagnosis for major depressive disorder. As such, it cannot replace a formal therapeutic or psychiatric evaluation.

Remember, only a physician or qualified mental health professional can make an accurate diagnosis for depression (or any other psychiatric disorder), after giving a complete evaluation, including a physical exam to rule out any medical illnesses or conditions.

The Quiz

Put a check mark in the box next to each of the following statements that refer to you and how you have felt, at least part of the time, for the last two weeks.

- Many mornings I wake up too early and have trouble going back to sleep.
- I have lost interest in things that I used to enjoy.
- I find that I am avoiding people.
- Many times it is an effort to leave the house.
- I find that I am increasingly irritated, even angry, over trivial things.
- I am tired a lot of the time and lack energy to do things I need to do.
- I am gaining or losing weight (more than 10 lbs. in the last 6 months or less if you are a female or small male).
- I feel as if I have lost control of my life.
- Most days of the week I feel blue, sad, or unhappy part of each day.
- My sleeping patterns have changed.
- Sometimes I think that people would be better off if I weren't around.
- I don't have the appetite that I use to have.
- I just can't seem to get things done like I used to do.
- I don't feel as happy as I used to feel.
- I feel guilty much of the time over things that never used to bother me.
- I often feel that I am not much good to anyone, including myself.
- I feel worse in the morning than at other times of the day.
- I am not thinking as clearly as I used to, and it is harder to concentrate.
- I feel that things always go wrong no matter what I do.
- I have been depressed in the past.

Now add up your check marks.

- ✓ 0-3: You are reading this book to help someone else, or to try to prevent a future episode of depression.
- ✓ 4-6: You may be on the borderline of depression. Keep reading, and start doing the action steps listed at the end of each chapter.
- ✓ 7-9: There is a good chance that you are depressed. Put into action the ideas discussed here. Consider getting a physical.
- ✓ 10-12: It's likely that depression has haunted you for some time. Change is not only possible but also likely, if you take action and follow through. Be sure to treat yourself with tenderness along the way. See your physician to determine if there are physical causes for the way you feel.
- ✓ 13-20: Unless other factors influenced your answers, you appear to be suffering from significant depression. Start working on the changes that are discussed here.

See a physician and/or a psychotherapist to help guide you in addressing your melancholy (turn to chapter 22 for guidelines on selecting a therapist).

Remember that this quiz only determines *symptoms* of depression. If your score is medium to high (7 or more), I recommend that you take a more sophisticated test and/or see a physician or a counselor to help determine if you really are depressed.

The Zung Scale is in Appendix A

You can use several inventories to help determine the existence and extent of your depression. These include the Beck Depression Inventory (1967), the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (1965), the Raskin Rating Scale for Depression (1970), and the Hamilton Rating Scale (1969).

Ultimately, you must be the judge. If you are not feeling your old self or doing the things you used to do, you may be struggling with depression. Or, at the very least, it is knocking at your door.

Is It Really Depression?

You don't have to call it depression, melancholia, or melancholy. (It is good to note that psychiatrists refer to melancholia as a specific type of atypical depression, a distinction beyond the scope of this book.) All three terms are used interchangeably in this book; *melancholic* refers to a person who suffers from depression. Name it the blues, if you prefer. Whatever the label, this malady is very different from the occasional low periods that people go through in the course of living. Psychiatrists use the term *major depression* to distinguish it from normal, passing sadness. Criteria for diagnosing major depression include the following nine symptoms:

- Low mood, sadness, and irritability for part of nearly every day
- Reduced pleasure or interest in daily activities
- Considerable weight loss or gain, or a change in appetite
- Significant change in sleeping patterns (most common is early waking)