



Start the Conversation: *Information for Veterans Dealing With Depression*

Everyone experiences sadness, irritability, or low energy from time to time. Depression is different. If you have depression, it can be hard to engage in everyday activities. You might focus on what's not going well in your life and may be unable to enjoy activities that typically bring you pleasure. Depression can put a strain on your relationships and sometimes may lead to feelings of despair.

While depression isn't always caused by a specific event, some Veterans experience it because of the loss of someone close to them, relationship conflicts (such as separation or divorce), or a job change or loss. When this sadness lasts for more than a few weeks or is significantly affecting your life, it may be a sign of depression. No matter what the source may be, it's important to seek treatment.

Mental health disorders, including major depression and other mood disorders, have been associated with increased risk for suicide.

— *Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016*

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU ARE DEPRESSED?

The signs and symptoms of depression may be hard to notice at first. One way to tell if what you're experiencing might need attention is to consider whether your thoughts, moods, or behaviors have changed noticeably: Is your mood different than "usual" for you? Have others noticed a difference? Two common symptoms of depression are (1) feeling sad or down and (2) losing interest in or not getting enjoyment from activities you once found pleasurable. If you experience either of these symptoms nearly every day for at least two weeks, you may be depressed.

Not everyone with depression has the same symptoms or feels the same way. One person might have difficulty sitting still, while another may find it hard to get out of bed each day.



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Other symptoms that may be signs of depression include:

- ▶ Gaining or losing weight
- ▶ Eating more or less than usual
- ▶ Having difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more than usual
- ▶ Feeling restless and unable to sit still, or the opposite (moving more slowly than usual)
- ▶ Feeling tired or as if you have no energy
- ▶ Feeling excessively guilty over things you have done or not done
- ▶ Having low self-esteem or feeling down on yourself
- ▶ Finding it hard to focus, remember things, or make decisions
- ▶ Feeling hopeless
- ▶ Thinking about death; feeling that life is not worth living

Having thoughts that others would be better off without you, feeling that there's no way out of your problems, or thinking about harming oneself, or about suicide, are very serious symptoms of depression and need immediate attention.

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DEPRESSION IS A CONDITION THAT CAN BE EFFECTIVELY TREATED

If you are depressed, treatment can help. Treatments for depression can involve psychotherapy or counseling, medication, or a combination. Psychotherapy can help you learn new ways to manage your symptoms, improve relationships, change maladaptive thinking, and discover solutions to life's difficulties. Antidepressant medications work in different ways to affect the neurochemicals in your brain that may be associated with depression. You may need to work with your doctor or counselor to try different types of treatment before finding what works best for you.

SOME PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION MAY BE IN CRISIS OR HAVE THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

Learn to recognize these warning signs of a mental health crisis. If you notice any of the following, get help immediately or encourage your Veteran to do so:

- ▶ Engaging in self-destructive behavior, such as drug abuse or reckless use of weapons
- ▶ Thinking about hurting or killing oneself
- ▶ Looking for ways or having a set plan in place to kill oneself
- ▶ Talking about death, dying, or suicide
- ▶ Saying final goodbyes to friends and family
- ▶ Putting personal affairs in order or giving away possessions

It's important that you talk to someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself, death, or suicide. You can always contact the **Veterans Crisis Line** by calling **1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1**, using the online chat, or **texting to 838255**. These services provide free, **confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year**.

For additional information and resources to help a Veteran you're concerned about, visit *Start the Conversation: New Tools for Veteran Suicide Prevention* at www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/starttheconversation