



## Recommended Web Sites

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)  
[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)  
[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

# Depression



## Contact Us @

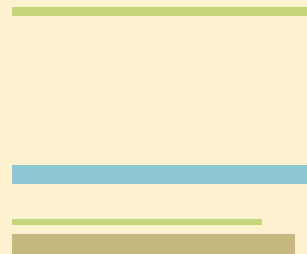
**Monroe Park Campus**  
1300 W. Broad St., suite 2200  
PO Box 842022  
Richmond, VA 23284-2022  
828-8828

**University Counseling Center**  
Monroe Park Campus  
907 Floyd Ave. room 238  
828-6200

**MCV Campus**  
VMI Building  
PO Box 980201  
Richmond, VA 23298-0201  
828-9220

**University Counseling Center**  
MCV Campus  
Grant House, 1008 E. Clay St. B-011  
828-3964

**Wellness Resource Center**  
University Student Health Services



[www.thewell.vcu.edu](http://www.thewell.vcu.edu)



## Facts & Figures

In the United States, 30% of the population will experience a major depression at some point in their lives.

Before puberty, males and females develop depression at the same rate. After puberty, women are twice as likely to develop depression

Depression is most common between the ages of 25 and 44.

If untreated, a major depression can last 6-12 months.

Approximately half of those who experience a major depressive episode will experience a recurrence.

Though treatment of depression is almost always successful, less than half of those affected will seek treatment

## Signs & Symptoms

- Fatigue.
- Sleep disturbances.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities.
- Appetite changes.
- Chronic pain.
- Digestive complaints- dry mouth, constipation, diarrhea.
- Worry/Anxiety.
- Irritability.
- Problems with memory and concentration.
- Physical symptoms that do not respond to medical treatment.
- Thoughts or plans to harm oneself.
- Feelings of helplessness, guilt, and worthlessness.

## Causes

Depression is thought to be caused by chemical imbalance in one or more of the neurotransmitters (norepinephrine or serotonin) that transmit electrical signals between the cells in the brain. This imbalance may be caused by many different factors including genetic, hormonal, stress, lack of coping skills, medical illnesses and drug/alcohol use.

## Treatment Options

The good news is that if treated properly, 80-90% of seriously depressed people get better.

Counseling can be very effective in treating mild to moderate depression. Additionally, it works well, along with medication, in treating more major depressive episodes. Counseling helps in identifying and examining thought processes. VCU students can use University Counseling Services located on the second floor of the Commons on the Monroe Park Campus (828-6200) and in the basement of the Grant House at 1008 East Clay St. (828-3964) on the MCV Campus.

## Medications

Medications prove effective in 70-80% of cases of major depression. Several different classes of medicines work by increasing the availability of neurotransmitters or by altering the sensitivity of the receptors or these chemical messengers. None of these medications are addictive. It usually takes 3-6 weeks to experience the full effects of these medications. If no improvement is noted within 4-8 weeks, your health care provider will make changes in the dose or medication. **Never stop these medications without professional advice.** In some cases, sudden discontinuation can cause dizziness, muscle aches, agitation, sleep disturbances and perhaps an increased chance of relapse. Often, it is recommended that an effective medication be continued for a year following a first depressive episode.

In addition to medication and professional counseling, an individual can do the following to facilitate his or her treatment:

- Exercise regularly.
- Avoid alcohol, illegal drugs and excessive caffeine.
- Eating well-balanced meals.
- Maintaining a regular sleep pattern.
- Join a support group and talk to family and friends.

## The Depression Self-Test

1. Do you feel lost, sad or empty most of the day?
2. Have you lost interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy?
3. Have you experienced a significant increase or decrease in appetite?
4. Have you experienced significant weight gain or weight loss without dieting?
5. Have you experienced a significant change in sleeping habits?
6. Do you feel unusually restless or unusually sluggish or slowed down?
7. Do you feel unduly tired or fatigued?
8. Do you have persistent feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or excessive guilt?
9. Do you have difficulty concentrating?
10. Do you have frequent thoughts of death or suicide?

**If you answered "yes" to 5 or more of the above questions (including #1 or #2) and if your symptoms have been present for 2 or more weeks, you might be depressed and should see a health care provider.**

Sources Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. 4th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association; 1994