



Depression

It is very common to feel depressed when faced with HIV or AIDS. Over half the people with HIV and AIDS are depressed at one time or another.

Depression is when you feel sad, hopeless, worthless or guilty for more than two weeks.

You should talk to your doctor if you feel depressed. You may miss doses of medicine if you are feeling low. Depression puts stress on your body. Both of these can make HIV worse. A depressed person may use drugs or have unsafe sex to feel better. This can hurt your HIV treatment and your health.

Signs

The signs can be hard to notice and show up slowly. Some signs happen in your body. These include:

- Feel tired or “blah”
- Problems with too much or not enough sleep
- Feeling dizzy or like you might pass out
- Having pain or headaches for no reason
- Feeling sick to your stomach or loose stool

Other signs have to do with how you feel. These can build up over time and you may not see them in yourself right away.

- A strong sense of guilt
- Thoughts that life is worthless or hopeless
- Hard to get up and go
- Not able to focus on things for very long
- Food does not sound good to you
- No pleasure from things you like to do
- Hard to concentrate
- Little or no interest in sex
- Thoughts that you should hurt yourself

- A sense that something bad will happen

People with mental illness, women, and people who abuse alcohol or drugs can get depressed more than other people.

A healthy diet, an active life and strong ties with friends help prevent depression.

If you are thinking about suicide or have a plan, **SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION RIGHT AWAY**. Call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-8255** for help.

Causes

Depression can be caused by:

- Life events. Things like treatment issues, money issues, the death of a friend or partner, or family problems
- Changes in your brain
- Some HIV meds or other meds may make you feel depressed.
- Other health problems. Anemia or diabetes can look like depression. People with HIV **and** hepatitis B or C are more often depressed. The treatment for these infections can make depression worse.
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Hormone changes
- Not enough vitamin B6 or B12

Treatment

Depression should not be taken lightly. It can change how you think and feel every day. There is treatment for depression.

- A trained person can help talk through fears and worries with you. It is good if he or she has worked with people with HIV before.

- A doctor can prescribe meds for depression treatment. Some meds for depression have side effects. These include a loss of sex drive, sleep problems or you may feel sick to your stomach.
- Good sleep, exercise and time in the sun also help.
- You can spend time with people who you like and who support you.

You can use your mind and what you do to change how you feel. You can learn how to handle stress and relax. You can use pictures in your mind to change how you feel in the moment.

Do not drink or use drugs to cope with depression. They make things worse.

Some herbs such as St. John's Wort are said to help. St. John's Wort does not mix well with HIV meds. Do not take St. John's Wort with HIV meds.

Prevention Tips

Depression can be treated but some forms may occur because of brain chemicals. Good health habits may help such as diet, exercise, and taking time out for fun.

Things to know

Depression is not a sign of weakness. It can be used to protect oneself from scary or painful things.

Depression shares symptoms with many other illnesses. A doctor may ask about:

- Drug and alcohol use
- If people in your family have been depressed
- How much coffee, tea, or soda you drink
- If you use other medicine, vitamins or herbs
- Stress level

Life with HIV and AIDS can bring up many issues that are hard to deal with. When you learn to ask for the help you need, it can make you a stronger person.

For more information

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call PHP Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

