Symptoms of Depression, Mild to Severe

What follows is a list of signs of depression; they are arranged in an approximate order of worsening severity. If any of them are present, consider whether some changes/support might be useful.

The (*) marks symptoms that might be easily missed that are particularly sensitive indicators of depression.

As you go further down the list, it becomes more important to get treatment, and if the symptoms towards the bottom of the list are present, specialized help is essential.

- Frequent self-critical thoughts
- Often take people’s responses as rejecting, or avoid social situations because of fear
- Emotional “weather” is generally gray *
- General sense that life is unrewarding, that all the enjoyable aspects are past
- Find self making excuses to avoid friends, not answering the phone *
- Sit “doing nothing” when have free time
- If you are in therapy, you seem stuck, with little sense of continuity between sessions
- Irritable with friends, family
- Sleep and appetite are increased or decreased, and sleep feels less restful
- Seemingly minor disappointments and losses become big deals
- Hard to concentrate
- Extremely immobilized, can’t even take care of basics; movements slow, voice very quiet (or opposite, extreme agitation and restlessness)
- Ordinarily pleasurable activities are not enjoyable *
- Can’t read for more than a few minutes, may spend time watching TV but barely noticing what’s on
- Emotions are hidden by alcohol use or preoccupation with minor illnesses
- Passive wish for death and/or fleeting thoughts of suicide
- Everything is an effort
- You have to force yourself to get out of bed
- Feel like life is “over”, nothing to look forward to
- Worries and/or self-criticism fill your waking thoughts
- Thoughts go around in circles, never offer any relief
- Some serious consideration of suicide, planning how you would prepare for suicide
- Tired most of the time
Points to Remember

If you’re unhappy, don’t get hung up in questioning whether you’re depressed; ask instead: “Would it be helpful to make some changes? Are there supports or tools that might be useful?” There may be better alternatives than an unsatisfying compromise.

- If you do feel stuck, despite your best efforts (or you can’t bring yourself to make much of an effort) consider specialized help, including medications.
- Don’t let shame stand in the way of improving your life. Antidotes to shame include:
  - Talking to someone that you particularly trust and respect about your shame.
  - Remembering or reading about the physical aspects of depression.
  - Reading an autobiographical book about depression: Matt Haig, William Styron, Mark Vonnegut, Patty Duke or Sally Brampton to name but a few.
  - Viewing medication as a tool – your tool – to use when helpful, and stop using it when it’s in the way.
  - Taking the hint – what is your unconscious, or your body, trying to tell you by forcing itself into your attention?

Helping Yourself

- Pay attention to your general well being; particularly when stressed, do whatever it takes to get enough sleep!
- Identify as specifically as you can what’s getting you down; identify what changes you’d like, and then figure out if some of those changes are possible.
- As above, try looking at your depression as a message that something needs to change, and even as a voice of some suppressed intelligence.
- Don’t look down at self-help books and get a good one.
- Identify one or two people that you can really talk to, and make use of their support.
- Consider attending a support group.
- Talk to a therapist, and consider getting evaluated for antidepressant medication.