

Is It Depression or the Blues?

It can be difficult to tell the difference between depression and a normal case of "the blues." Everyone gets the blues at times because of troubling events—the loss of a loved one, job difficulties, money problems, family issues, illness, etc. Most cases of the blues disappear quickly and do not prevent the person from finding enjoyment.

With depression, the pervasive feeling of sadness exists most days for a period of two weeks. Take the self-assessment quiz to see if you may have depression.

Normal reactions

Stressful or tragic events, such as the death of a spouse or child, cause many of the symptoms of depression (sadness, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance and fatigue). But a person with these symptoms is not considered depressed unless he also has feelings of worthlessness, guilt and/or low self-esteem. Nevertheless, these can be painful emotional times that may last for weeks or months.

Such normal emotional reactions to stressful events often are diagnosed as:

- grief (due to the loss of a loved one)
- an adjustment disorder (an emotional reaction to a clearly identified source of stress, such as relationship, job or financial issues)

With or without treatment, these feelings typically improve.

Treatment may help someone develop healthier coping mechanisms for dealing with the source of grief or stress. In severe cases, these episodes could lead to major depression.

Crossing the line

If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions, consider seeking professional help:

- Is your mood interfering with your personal relationships or your job performance?
- Have these feelings lasted for longer than two weeks?
- Is your stress from a single, identified stress (for example, the serious illness of a child) that does not have a clear end in sight?
- Are you beginning to feel worthless or guilty about the situation?
- Is the stress not allowing you to find happiness in other parts of your life?

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