



Depression: Symptoms and Tips

Depression in adolescents

- Depression in children and adolescents does not always manifest in the way it does with adults.
- Instead of being sad and debilitated, a depressed youth may be agitated and irritable, have physical symptoms such as headaches and stomachaches and even be able to move in and out of a depressed mood.
- Teens may snap at friends and family over the smallest things.
- Teens are not as well educated about feelings and somaticize instead of talking about them. Thus “my head hurts” or “my stomach hurts” are ways of saying “I hurt”.
- Teens react to their environment and periodically leave their sadness behind.
- Children with behavior problems or anxiety also are more likely to get depressed. Sometimes, it can be hard to identify any triggering event.
- Teens are impulsive and may seek out risky or unsafe behavior as a way to mask their depression.

Common symptoms of depression in younger children

- Feeling or appearing depressed, sad, tearful, or irritable
- Decreased interest in or pleasure from activities, which may lead to withdrawal from friends or after-school activities
- Change in appetite, with associated weight
- Major changes in sleeping patterns, such as sleeping much more or less than normal
- Appearing to be physically sped up or slowed down
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Thoughts or expressions of suicide or self-destructive behavior

In children, it is important to keep in mind that an increase in irritability or even complaints of boredom may be more noticeable than sadness. **Children also may have more physical complaints, particularly if the child does not have the habit of talking about how he or she feels.** Talk of suicide or not wanting to be alive can be difficult to interpret, so it must be taken seriously and brought immediately to a mental health professional's attention.

Antidepressant and Antianxiety Medications: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) adopted a “black box” warning label on all antidepressant medications to alert the public about the **potential increased risk of suicidal thinking or attempts in children and adolescents taking antidepressants up to age 25.** The warning emphasizes that children, adolescents and young adults taking antidepressants should be closely monitored, especially during the initial weeks of treatment, for any worsening depression, suicidal thinking or behavior, or any unusual changes in behavior such as sleeplessness, agitation, or withdrawal from normal social situations.

