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Dysthymia

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Alternative Names

Neurotic depression (dysthymia); Dysthymic disorder; Chronic depression; Depression - chronic

Definition [Return to top](#)

Dysthymia is a [chronic](#) form of depression characterized by moods that are consistently low, but not as extreme as in other types of depression.

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The exact cause of dysthymia is unknown. Although the symptoms are not as severe as those of other forms of [depression](#), affected people struggle nearly every day with low self-esteem, despair, and hopelessness.

As with major depressive disorder, dysthymia occurs more frequently in women than in men and affects up to 5% of the general population. Dysthymia can occur alone or in conjunction with more severe depression or other mood or psychiatric disorder.

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The main symptom of dysthymia is low, dark, or sad mood nearly every day for at least 2 years. Other symptoms can include:

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- [Poor appetite](#) or overeating
- [Insomnia](#) or [hypersomnia](#)
- Low energy or [fatigue](#)
- Low self-esteem
- Poor concentration
- Feelings of hopelessness

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Dysthymia is evaluated by taking a careful history of mood and other mental health symptoms over the past several months.

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As with other forms of depression, there are a number of treatment options for people with dysthymia. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors such as fluoxetine (Prozac) are often used. Talk therapies, such as cognitive/behavioral therapy and interpersonal therapy, have also been shown to be effective.

Some evidence suggests the combination of medication and psychotherapy may result in the most improvement.

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By definition, dysthymia is a chronic condition lasting many years. Though some people completely recover, others continue to have some symptoms despite treatment. Maintenance medication and therapy may be required.

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Antidepressant drugs have a number of side effects that can complicate treatment. For example, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors may cause stomach upset, mild insomnia, and reduced sex drive. However, untreated dysthymia can progress into a major depressive episode, a phenomenon known as "double depression."

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Call for an appointment with your health care provider if you suffer from a persistently depressed mood.

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Updated by: Paul Ballas, D.O., Department of Psychiatry, Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, Philadelphia, PA. Review provided by VeriMed Healthcare Network.



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