



# EAP Educates: What is Depression?

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A **depressive disorder** is a “whole-body” illness, involving your body, mood and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself and the way you think about things.

Being clinically depressed is very different from the down type of feeling that all people experience from time to time. Occasional feelings of sadness are a normal part of life and it is unfortunate that such feelings are often colloquially referred to as “depression”. When a person is clinically depressed, these feelings of sadness and the like are completely out of proportion to the external causes for those feelings. There are things in everyone’s life that are possible causes of sadness, but people who are not depressed manage to cope with these things without becoming incapacitated. A depressive disorder is not a passing blue mood. It is not a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away. People with a depressive illness cannot merely “pull themselves together” and get better.

As one might expect, depression can present itself as feeling sad or “having the blues”. However, sadness may not always be the dominant feeling of a depressed person. Depression can also be experienced as a numb or empty feeling, or perhaps no awareness of feeling at all. A depressed person may experience a noticeable loss in their ability to feel pleasure about anything. Depression, as viewed by psychiatrists, is an illness in which a person experiences a marked change in their mood and in the way they view themselves and the world. Depression as a significant depressive disorder ranges from short in duration (2- 6 weeks) and mild, to long term and very severe, even life threatening.

As is the case with other illnesses such as heart disease, depressive disorders come in different forms. The most prevalent forms are as follows:

- **Major depression:** most serious type and many people suffering from major depression cannot continue to function normally.
- **Dysthymia:** mild, chronic depression which lasts two years or longer. People with this disorder usually continue to function at work or school, but often feel like they are going through the motions. This person may not even realise they are depressed.
- **Bipolar disorder:** Bipolar disorder is an illness that affects thoughts, feelings, perceptions, behaviour and even how a person feels physically. Most often, a person with manic-depression experiences moods that shift from high to low and back again in varying degrees of severity. The two poles of bipolar disorder are mania and depression.



- **Reactive depression**: This occurs as a result of a loss, trauma or a significant event(s) in a person's life which result in depression due to the overwhelming nature of these events.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR CONFIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE, CONTACT THE EAP