Diagnosis of Depression

by Amy Scholten, MPH

En Español (Spanish Version)

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and medical history. A physical exam will be done. Your doctor may also do a mental health evaluation and search for physical causes of depression. These findings will be used to make the diagnosis. There is no blood test or specific diagnostic test for depression.

Depression is often diagnosed based on the following:

- **Initial assessment**—Your doctor will ask about your symptoms:
  - When the symptom started
  - Any triggering events
  - How severe the symptoms are
  - How symptoms affect your daily activities
  - Their association with chronic pain
  - Whether you have had these symptoms before and, if so, whether the symptoms were treated and what treatment was given

- **Physical exam**—Your doctor will give you a thorough physical exam. Certain medications, as well as some medical conditions, such as viral infection, can cause the same symptoms as depression. Your doctor can rule out these possibilities through a physical exam, interview, and lab tests. The physical exam may include a mental status exam to determine if your speech, thought patterns, or memory have been affected. This may indicate a neurologic cause of depression.

- **Psychological evaluation**—A psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker, or mental health counselor can give you a psychological exam. You may take a special screening test for depression, such as the Beck Depression Inventory or the Hamilton Rating Scale. These tests have limitations, however, and must be interpreted in the context of your symptoms and personal situation.

- **Evaluation for other conditions that may coexist with depression** (such as alcohol and drug abuse, anxiety disorders, and personality disorders)

**REFERENCES:**


Previous | Next

Last reviewed September 2011 by Ryan Estevez, MD, PhD, MPH
Last Updated: 9/1/2011