

Understanding Depression

Contrary to popular belief, depression is not a weakness, a choice, or a result of being overly emotional. But it does warrant support and compassion from others.

Depression is a mental health condition marked by long-lasting sadness and lack of interest in activities. People experiencing depression may find it harder to do daily tasks and connect with others.

Talking about depression may not feel comfortable, but depression is common and treatable. In fact, depression affects about 280 million people across the globe, according to the [World Health Organization](#). People of all races, ages, ethnicities, and genders experience depression, including [12 percent of people who are pregnant or recently gave birth](#).

Some people may go through depression more than once, which can feel frustrating. Others, meanwhile, may experience anxiety and depression at the same time. Overlaps in symptoms and diagnoses can make it difficult for people to know where their issues are coming from.

Fortunately, there is help. Around [80-90 percent of people who are treated for depression get better](#). Sometimes this treatment is learning to adjust negative thinking; other times, medication may be recommended. In therapy, people learn skills they can use during and after treatment ends to help them counter depression in the future.



What is the difference between depression and anxiety?

Many people wonder about the difference between depression and anxiety. While anxiety and depression are distinct mental health conditions, they share certain symptoms. For instance, both conditions are linked to fatigue, trouble sleeping, and problems with concentration. Although there can be overlap in symptoms, anxiety primarily involves excessive worry and fear, physical unease, and avoidance of feared situations.

Meanwhile, symptoms of depression usually include:

-  Feeling sad most of the day
-  Not enjoying typically pleasurable activities
-  Changes in appetite or weight
-  Sleeping much more or less than usual
-  Fatigue or loss of energy
-  Sense of worthlessness or guilt
-  Feeling physically slowed down or agitated
-  Trouble concentrating or making decisions
-  Thoughts about death or suicide

In addition to the core symptoms, depression has other common traits. For instance, physical discomfort like stomach aches can be a sign, as well as tearfulness and withdrawing from social life.



The 5 most common depression symptoms across 6 different regions

Recent studies show that [different cultures may vary in terms of how they experience depression](#). Understanding the unique ways in which depression shows up can help everyone feel seen, understood, and supported.



Western (non-indigenous)

- 1 DEPRESSED MOOD
- 2 LONELINESS
- 3 FATIGUE
- 4 SLEEP TROUBLES
- 5 LOST INTEREST



Latin America

- 1 FATIGUE
- 2 DEPRESSED MOOD
- 3 CRYING
- 4 LOST INTEREST
- 5 LONELINESS



Middle East

- 1 DEPRESSED MOOD
- 2 LONELINESS
- 3 FATIGUE
- 4 IRRITABILITY
- 5 SLEEP TROUBLES & GENERAL PAIN



Sub-Saharan Africa

- 1 DEPRESSED MOOD
- 2 SLEEP TROUBLES
- 3 APPETITE/WEIGHT CHANGES
- 4 FATIGUE
- 5 LONELINESS



South Asia

- 1 SLEEP TROUBLES
- 2 FATIGUE
- 3 DEPRESSED MOOD
- 4 APPETITE/WEIGHT CHANGES
- 5 HEADACHES & CHEST PAIN



Southeast Asia

- 1 CHEST PAIN
- 2 DEPRESSED MOOD
- 3 SLEEP TROUBLES
- 4 LONELINESS
- 5 THINKING TOO MUCH

Source: Haroz, E. E., Ritchey, M., Bass, J. K., Kohrt, B. A., Augustinavicius, J., Michalopoulos, L., Burkey, M. D., & Bolton, P. (2017). How is depression experienced around the world? A systematic review of qualitative literature. *Social Science & Medicine*, 183, 151–162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.12.030>



If you notice depression symptoms in yourself

Recognizing symptoms of depression can feel unsettling, but it's an important step toward getting relief from painful symptoms. If you think you may be experiencing depression, consider the following actions:

- **Meet with a mental health expert and also a medical provider.**

Certain medical conditions can have symptoms similar to those of depression. Medical providers can make sure your symptoms aren't due to an underlying issue. Meanwhile a therapist can help you learn new ways to feel better.

- **Get support from your community.**

Sharing painful feelings with friends or family can feel awkward or embarrassing. Community support doesn't always involve openly discussing your emotions. Try seeking advice from respected elders, participating in group spiritual or religious practices, or working on a team project.

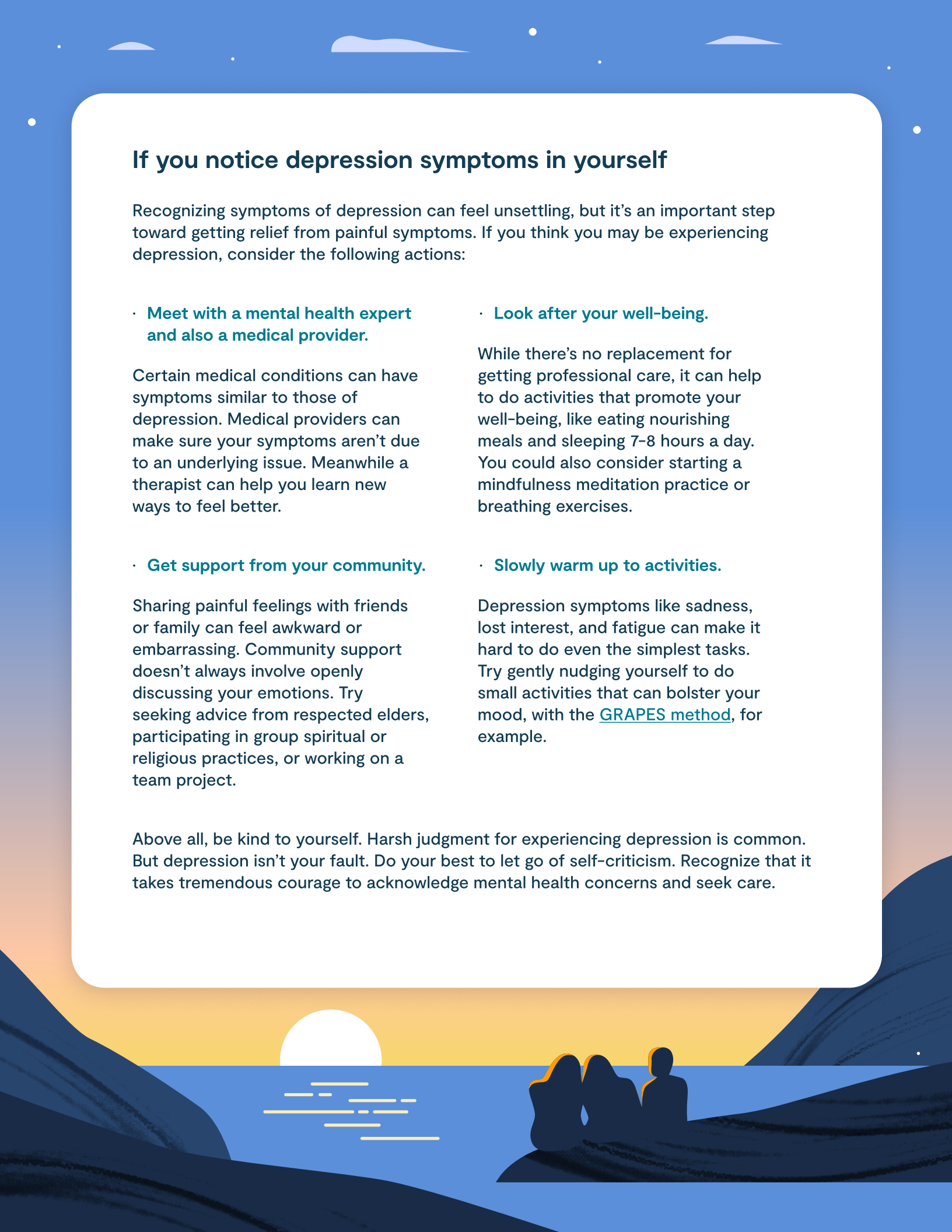
Above all, be kind to yourself. Harsh judgment for experiencing depression is common. But depression isn't your fault. Do your best to let go of self-criticism. Recognize that it takes tremendous courage to acknowledge mental health concerns and seek care.

- **Look after your well-being.**

While there's no replacement for getting professional care, it can help to do activities that promote your well-being, like eating nourishing meals and sleeping 7-8 hours a day. You could also consider starting a mindfulness meditation practice or breathing exercises.

- **Slowly warm up to activities.**

Depression symptoms like sadness, lost interest, and fatigue can make it hard to do even the simplest tasks. Try gently nudging yourself to do small activities that can bolster your mood, with the [GRAPES method](#), for example.



If you notice signs of depression in others

If you suspect someone you know is experiencing depression, offering encouragement can make a big difference in their journey to recovery. Here are some ways you might help:

- **Share your concerns.**

In a comfortable setting, mention that you've noticed changes in their mood and behavior and offer support. For example: "I wanted to check in because you've seemed down and less interested in hanging out lately. I'm here for you."

- **Gently suggest that they seek mental health expertise.**

If you've personally benefited from mental health care, consider offering your success story. This can be encouraging and help others feel less alone.

- **Listen and show kindness.**

Sometimes, just being there and showing you care can bring comfort. For example: "I'm sorry you're hurting. How you're feeling is important, and I'm here to listen." Check out these [additional recommendations](#) for showing kindness.

- **Respect unique experiences.**

Each person's values, beliefs, and social norms can shape how they move through depression. Do your best not to compare or judge others for their feelings.

- **Promote mental health awareness.**

Initiate conversations about well-being and share resources with others. Avoid using language like "crazy" and "insane." Instead, show respect for people who are having trouble with their feelings when discussing mental health.





Learn how to get unstuck and feel better

Depression is a common condition that affects hundreds of millions of people worldwide. A thorough evaluation by a provider is needed to accurately diagnose and develop a tailored treatment plan that addresses your unique needs.

If you feel you are at risk to yourself or others, call the 988 Lifeline. This crisis resource is available to anyone in need of support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with expert care available to military veterans and Spanish speakers.

If you notice signs of depression or anxiety in yourself or others, remember that help is available, and you don't have to face it alone.

[Get started with Lyra today](#)