

What Are the Risk Factors for Depression?

Depression is a diagnosable condition, just like diabetes or heart disease, which means that certain factors may increase your risk for developing the disease. Aside from certain triggers like stressful and upsetting situations or major life changes which can bring about depression symptoms, there are also various medical, social, and substance-related factors which increase an individual's risk for depression. You will find an overview of these risk factors below:

Medical Risk Factors for Depression

- **Genetics** – According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), an identical twin has a 70% chance of developing depression if the other twin has been diagnosed with it. It has also become clear that if you have an immediate family member (such as a parent or sibling) with depression, your risk for developing it is greatly increased. It is still possible, however, for individuals with no family history of depression to develop depression symptoms.
- **Biochemistry** – Researchers believe that depression occurs when certain neurotransmitters in the brain become imbalanced. Neurotransmitters like serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine help the brain communicate with the rest of the body, playing an important role in regulating physiological functions. Low levels of certain neurotransmitters can increase an individual's risk for depression.
- **Medical Illness** – Certain medical illnesses cause a great deal of pain or stress which can have a negative impact on an individual's mental state of being. Individuals suffering from chronic conditions have a higher risk for developing depression – some examples include arthritis, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, stroke, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and chronic pain disorders.
- **Sleep Disorders** – Experts have observed a positive correlation between chronic sleep problems and depression. Though it is still unknown whether lack of sleep actually causes depression, episodes of low mood and low self-esteem have been observed to follow periods of poor sleep or lack of sleep.

Social Risk Factors for Depression

- **Gender** – Depression can affect both males and females, though females are twice as likely as males to develop depression symptoms. It is unclear whether females actually develop depression more frequently or if they are simply more likely to seek treatment. It is also worth noting that the hormonal changes caused by childbirth and menopause can affect a woman's risk for depression as well – postpartum depression is very common.
- **History** – People with a history of physical or sexual abuse seem to be more prone to developing depression. These experiences can lead to other mental conditions as well.
- **Social Support** – Individuals who do not have a strong social support system tend to experience feelings of isolation or loneliness which can contribute to depression and other mood disorders.
- **Major Life Events** – While major life events may not cause depression, they can trigger depression symptoms. Examples include losing a job, moving to a new area, having a baby, the death of a loved one, or a traumatic experience.

Substance-Related Risk Factors for Depression

- **Alcohol or Drugs** – Substance abuse, particularly with drugs and alcohol, is frequently closely related to depression. Drugs and alcohol (especially when used frequently or to excess) can cause changes in brain chemistry which might increase your risk for depression. It is also common for individuals suffering from depression symptoms to self-medicate with alcohol and/or drugs.
- **Medications** – The use of certain medications has been linked to depression symptoms – these may include sedatives, sleeping pills, steroids, blood pressure medications, and prescription painkillers. If you are taking any of these medications, talk to your doctor about any depression symptoms you may be experiencing as a side effect.

Because depression is a mental health issue, its causes are likely related to changes in brain chemistry. Although the exact cause for these changes is unknown,

certain risk factors like those discussed above have been correlated with the changes in brain chemistry which have been known to trigger depression symptoms. If you or a loved one has one or more of these risk factors, you should keep an eye out for depression symptoms at contact your doctor if they develop.