

Depression.

College can be an exciting time — with new emotions, new experiences, and new challenges — but it can also be a confusing time, filled with anxiety, uncertainty, and difficulties. Leaving family and friends, moving to a new city, meeting new people, and facing new academic challenges can easily contribute to feeling lonely and overwhelmed. For some, these feelings disappear after a short time. For others, however, these feelings linger, and thoughts of returning home, transferring schools, escaping, or even ending life may occur. If these feelings persist, they can leave an individual feeling confused and scared.

If you are experiencing these or other symptoms of depression, **you are not alone**. Almost everyone experiences depression at some point in life. However, it is important to know when to get help and that **you can do something about depression**.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

While everyone's experience of depression is unique, the following symptoms are common:

Physical

Poor appetite or overeating
Low energy or fatigue
Sleep disturbances

Academic

Decreased motivation
Difficulty concentrating

Psychological

Feeling hopeless
Low self-esteem
Self-critical thoughts
Feeling that no one values you
Feeling no purpose to existence
Recurring thoughts of death

Social

Decreased interest in activities you enjoy
Decreased trust in others
Easily irritated
Wanting to spend time alone
Difficulty relating to people

Emotional

Feeling sad, empty, alone, or hopeless
Excessive crying
Feeling more tense or anxious than usual
Excessive worrying
Overreacting to situations

If you identify with some of the symptoms described above and are concerned that you might be depressed, please call the UCS (804-828-6200) to learn more about scheduling an appointment with a counselor.

Coping with Depression

- **Challenge the negative thoughts in your head.** Depression can make you feel alone or worthless. You might find yourself thinking that nothing good ever happens, that no one cares about you, or that things will never get better. Realize that these thoughts are coming from depression — not you.
- **Be aware of your stress levels.** Now is not the time to be taking on new projects and responsibilities. Consider paring down what you're doing to make your schedule more manageable.

- **Take care of your body.** Try to eat nutritious meals, get exercise, and get enough sleep (7-8 hours a night).
- **Surround yourself with supportive people.** Friends who have a negative outlook will only make you feel more negative.
- **Take life one day at a time.** Don't get consumed with thoughts of the future: make small goals and don't think about the whole semester. Try to add more structure to your life.
- **Avoid alcohol.** It is a depressant, and will only amplify your depressive feelings.
- **Become involved** – don't take on a huge commitment, but try to find something you enjoy. Volunteering to help others might help you to focus more on positive things.
- **Remember depression is treatable.** You may need to talk with a counselor, but you can overcome depression.
- **Express your feelings.** Don't keep your emotions bottled up. Find a way to experience feelings that is comfortable for you – talk to someone (friend, family member, counselor, religious leader, professor, etc.), write in a journal, go to a support group.

Helping a Friend Who is Depressed

1. **Be supportive.** Listen to your friend. Set aside time so that you can talk without being interrupted. Let your friend know that you care and are willing to help.
2. Introduce your friend to **coping techniques** such as those suggested above. If these don't seem to help, suggest that your friend seek professional help. You may wish to come to the UCS to find resources for your friend.
3. Understand that your friend is experiencing **depression**. Your friend won't just “snap out of it.” Overcoming depression takes work and time.
4. Remember to **take care of yourself**. Being there for your friend should not come at the expense of your own health, physical or mental. If you are overwhelmed, take a step back and consider calling a counselor for advice.

University Counseling Services
Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services
Virginia Commonwealth University
 (804) 828-6200 Monroe Park; (804) 828-3964 Medical Center Campus
 Or visit <http://www.students.vcu.edu/counseling/>

