

DEPRESSION IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS



About 11% of adolescents have a depressive disorder by age 18. Girls are more likely than boys to experience depression. The risk for depression increases as a child gets older. Major depressive disorder is the leading cause of disability among Americans age 15 to 44.

People believed that children could not get depression. Teens with depression were often dismissed as being moody or difficult. It wasn't known that having depression can increase a person's risk for heart disease, diabetes, and other diseases.

It is now known that youths who have depression may show signs that are slightly different from the typical adult symptoms of depression. Children who are depressed may complain of feeling sick, refuse to go to school, cling to a parent or caregiver, or worry excessively that a parent may die. Older children and teens may sulk, get into trouble at school, be negative or grouchy, or feel misunderstood.

There are new treatment approaches that include medication plus a specialized psychotherapy designed specifically to reduce depression and any suicidal thinking and behavior in severely depressed teens.

Depressed teens with coexisting disorders such as substance abuse problems are less likely to respond to treatment for depression. Studies focusing on conditions that frequently co-occur and how they affect one another may lead to more targeted screening tools and interventions.

Although antidepressants are generally safe, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has placed a black box warning label — the most serious type of warning — on all antidepressant medications. The warning says there is an increased risk of suicidal thinking or attempts in youth taking antidepressants. Youth and young adults should be closely monitored especially during initial weeks of treatment.

Source: U.S. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health.