

Best Depression Tests

Self-screening results could motivate you to seek professional help for depression symptoms.

By [Lisa Esposito](#), Staff Writer May 29, 2019, at 10:07 a.m.

This article is based on reporting that features expert sources including **Bradley Gaynes, MD, MPH; Anita Gadhia-Smith, PsyD, LCSW-C, LICSW**

Best Depression Tests

IF YOU'RE PERSISTENTLY feeling down or you're troubled by sharp mood changes, how can you tell whether what you're experiencing is normal or more serious?

By going online, you can access depression tests that are easy to understand and take just minutes to complete. Some are mental health screening tools commonly used in clinical settings worldwide. Others are adapted or shortened versions.

Many depression tests have been validated through robust research and are backed by established mental health organizations. Self-tests alone can't diagnose mental health conditions such as [depression](#), [anxiety](#) or [bipolar disorder](#), but they can nudge you toward seeking a professional evaluation.

"Tests, whether they're online or in a therapist's office, are a piece of the assessment process, but not the most critical," says Anita Gadhia-Smith, a psychotherapist who practices in the District of Columbia and suburban Maryland. "They can help to gather information, but you really need to have a clinical interview with a qualified mental health professional before you can have an accurate diagnosis – and most importantly, an accurate treatment plan."

Self-test results may give shape to issues you already suspected. "Most people know that they're hurting," Gadhia-Smith says. "That's why they've looked up a test or come to you in the first place. Most people know that they don't feel good. They might not always be able to identify sadness, despair or grief. That's where a therapist can be helpful, to help them name what they're feeling – and then deal directly with it."

Depression and Mood-Disorder Tests

Self-test results may require expert interpretation. If your results – or instincts – suggest you might have a problem, ask your doctor or therapist about a comprehensive mental health assessment. Below are some well-established depression and mood disorder tests:

- **Patient Health Questionnaire-9.** This quick, nine-item test closely follows the components of depression identified in the DSM-5, the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. [PHQ-9](#) users rate how often they've been bothered by individual problems in the past few weeks, from "not at all" to "nearly every day." Sample problem: "Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much." Modified versions of the PHQ-9 are also available for teens.
- **Quick Inventory for Depressive Symptomatology.** The 16-item [QIDS](#) is a shorter version of the original 30-item Inventory for Depressive Symptomatology. Respondents have a four-choice spectrum for each item. A sample item on mood ranges from "I do not feel sad" to "I feel sad nearly all of the time."
- **Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale.** The 10-item [EPDS](#) is used to identify women with [postpartum depression](#), or more broadly, perinatal mood disorders that occur during pregnancy or within a year after delivery. The EPDS was also designed to identify specific factors that are more likely in these women – like anxiety.
- **My Mood Monitor Screen.** The [M3 checklist](#) was designed to capture multiple types of mental health conditions when administered by primary care providers – often the first point of contact for people seeking help. Anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) are all addressed. Users rank specific item statements from "not at all" to "most of the time" over the past two weeks. A sample statement: "I am nervous or shaky in social situations."
- **Child Behavior Checklist.** For the [CBCL](#), scoring of results is done by professionals, who use response forms completed by parents, teachers and children to assess behavioral, social and emotional functioning in kids ages 6 to 18. A preschool version of the CBCL is also available.

- **Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression**

Scale. The [CESD](#) measures depressive symptoms in sometimes overlooked groups, such as elderly adults and [caregivers](#). Users rank how often they've felt a certain way in the previous week, from "rarely" to "most or all of the time." A sample item is: "I felt that everything I did was an effort."

- **Goldberg Depression Test.** This [18-question test](#) created by researcher Dr. Ivan Goldberg asks participants to rank items from "not at all" to "very much." A sample item is: "I am agitated and keep moving around."

The Beck Depression Inventory, a landmark test first published in 1961 with several subsequent revisions, is not freely available to the public online. Clinicians use the 21-item BDI-II or shorter, seven-item BDI FastScreen to measure depression severity in adults and adolescents."

Two core features of a depression diagnosis are depressive mood and anhedonia, says Dr. Bradley Gaynes, a professor of psychiatry at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine. Anhedonia means a loss of interest or pleasure in anything. "People are maybe doing what they normally do, like exercising or listening to music or studying or spending time with family – things that usually bring them a great deal of joy – and just can't get any joy or pleasure," he explains.

Hopelessness is another major focus of depression screening, because it's connected to [suicide risk](#). "Although it's pretty rare, some people who are depressed are at high risk of trying to harm themselves or possibly take their life," Gaynes says. "Hopelessness ends up being one of the best predictors."

Gaynes emphasizes that self-tests aren't a replacement for a professional mental health assessment. "They can help someone know whether what they're experiencing is really substantially outside of what most people experience, to give them an idea: 'Yeah, this is something where everyone has their ups and downs' or 'actually what I'm describing here is more concerning than that,'" he says.

Screening tools can bring these factors to light but they're still not definitive. Confirmation is needed by a clinician who can accurately assess a person's symptoms and level of impairment, Gaynes says. "That's how the diagnosis is made. It's not made on filling out a nine-item questionnaire in a couple minutes."

However, if you find it hard to talk about your problems and don't know where to start, self-test results can provide a concrete way to open up a conversation with your clinician, Gaynes says. Used as a starting point, he says, online tools may help you realize it's OK to talk with others, that help is available and "people aren't expected to treat a clinical depressive episode all by themselves."

More Depression Self-Help Resources

The Mental Health America website includes quick [online screening tools](#) for a variety of mood disorders, offered in English and Spanish.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness provides a list of common [warning signs](#) for mental health conditions in adults, adolescents and young children.

Am I Just Sad – or Actually Depressed?



[View All 10 Slides](#)