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Suicide — Know the Warning Signs, and How to Help

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola | November 27, 2026

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the U.S., with an estimated 21 million U.S. adults having at least one major depressive episode in 2021, and the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide
- After climbing since the early 2000s, the U.S. suicide rate has hovered near 14 deaths per 100,000 people since 2017; suicide deaths hit a record 49,476 in 2022, and 48,824 people died by suicide in 2024
- In 2025, 14% of U.S. high school students seriously considered suicide and 6% attempted it, an improvement from 2023, though girls remain at higher risk than boys
- In 2024, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.; that year, an estimated 14.3 million adults seriously thought about suicide and 2.2 million attempted it
- Know the common causes of suicide, the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide, and how you can help them

The suicides of fashion designer Kate Spade on June 5, 2018,[1] and celebrity chef and TV personality Anthony Bourdain on June 8, 2018,[2] which occurred within days of each other, reignited a much-needed public discussion about suicide, mental illness and its treatment. As noted by Dr. Anne Schuchat, then-principal deputy director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), depression "is not a condition that is related to success or failure. No one is immune."[3]

Statistics also reveal suicide rates have risen sharply across the U.S. since the early 2000s, prompting health authorities to call for "a comprehensive approach to addressing depression."[4] However, while a number of headlines scream for new drug treatment,[5] I believe we'll get nowhere fast unless we start to address mental health from a more holistic perspective.

It seems quite clear that antidepressants, in addition to not working very well (or in some cases at all), are actually part of the problem thanks to their side effects.

Meanwhile, nutritional deficiencies, a decline in social interaction brought about by increasing reliance on social media and technology, excessive exposure to electromagnetic fields (EMFs), lack of sleep, "lack of life purpose" or spiritual connection and chronic, unresolved stress are just some of the factors that can contribute to depression, none of which can be addressed by new or more drugs.

Specific medical conditions, such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and stroke are also linked to a higher risk of major depressive disorder.

Spade's Suicide Took Those Closest to Her by Surprise

According to Spade's husband and business partner, Andy Spade, Kate had struggled with depression and anxiety for several years, and was taking medication for these issues.[6,7] The couple separated 10 months before her death but lived within blocks of each other, met on a daily basis and had "never even discussed divorce," according to Andy, who stressed she did not have an alcohol problem or business-related struggles.

Her father, Frank Brosnahan, also confirmed she'd been "taking pills," which he'd "advised her not to take."[8] Both her husband and father spoke to her the night before her apparent suicide, saying she sounded happy and that there was no indication that she was thinking about taking her own life.[9] Both say her suicide came as a complete shock.

The same appears to be true for Bourdain, who had spent the previous five years enthralling viewers with his passion for food and travel in his award-winning series "Parts Unknown." His body was discovered by Eric Ripert, a French chef and close friend, in his hotel room. Bourdain was in France, working on an upcoming episode.

Overwhelmingly, the sentiment was that he was a passionate and generous individual, a master of his craft and staunch defender of marginalized populations, especially restaurant workers, in the middle of doing something he loved. In fact, some of the last words Bourdain said to his friend Michael Ruhlman was that "love abounds." "The last I knew, he was in love. He was happy," Ruhlman said, who was "stunned" by the news.[10] His girlfriend Asia Argento appeared equally shocked.

Spade and Bourdain Were Not the Last

In the years since, suicide has continued to claim well-known figures, many of whom seemed to be thriving in public.

They include former Miss USA and "Extra" correspondent Cheslie Kryst, who died January 30, 2022, at age 30;[11] country music star Naomi Judd of The Judds, who died April 30, 2022, at age 76, one day before the duo's scheduled induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame;[12] dancer and "Ellen DeGeneres Show" DJ Stephen "tWitch" Boss, who died December 13, 2022, at age 40;[13] "Revenge of the Nerds" and "Lizzie McGuire" actor Robert Carradine, who died February 23, 2026, at age 71;[14] and "Breaking Bad" actor and disability rights advocate RJ Mitte, who died October 12, 2026, at age 34.[15]

In announcing their mother's death, Judd's daughters said they had lost her "to the disease of mental illness,"[16] and Carradine's family publicly acknowledged his "valiant struggle against his nearly two-decade battle with Bipolar Disorder."[17] Their openness is a reminder that mental illness often goes unseen, even in people who appear to have it all.

Suicide Statistics

Depression is one of the most common mental disorders in the U.S., with an estimated 21 million adults having at least one major depressive episode in 2021,[18] and the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide.[19,20] Globally, rates of depression increased by 18% between 2005 and 2015.[21]

In the U.S., suicide rates rose steadily after 2000, primarily in more rural areas[22,23] — a trend blamed on the effects of social isolation, economic pressures, opioid addiction and limited access to mental health care. Since 2017, the national rate has hovered near 14 deaths per 100,000 people.[24]

Depression can be a terminal illness if a person continually attempts and eventually is successful at taking their own life. Tragically, suicide has taken a heavy toll on children and teens. This simply should speak to some deeper societal problems at work, although antidepressants may play a role in some of these cases as well.

Many antidepressants are known to increase the risk of suicide in children, teens and young adults,[25] yet despite such warnings, these drugs are still often prescribed for younger people. According to the most recent statistics:

- In 2024, 48,824 people in the U.S. died by suicide, about one death every 11 minutes[26]
- Suicide deaths reached a record 49,476 in 2022 and declined slightly through 2024; early provisional data show deaths ticked up again in 2025, to roughly 49,000[27,28]
- The age-adjusted suicide rate was 13.7 per 100,000 people in 2024, down from 14.1 in 2023, and has hovered near 14 since 2017[29]
- Men die by suicide at nearly four times the rate of women[30]
- In 2024, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S. and the second leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 44[31]
- In 2024, an estimated 14.3 million U.S. adults seriously thought about suicide, 4.6 million made a suicide plan and 2.2 million attempted suicide[32]

- In 2025, 14% of U.S. high school students seriously considered suicide and 6% attempted it, down from 20% and 9% in 2023; girls remain at higher risk, with 18% of female students seriously considering suicide versus 11% of male students[33],[34]
- Worldwide, an estimated 727,000 people died by suicide in 2021, and suicide was the third leading cause of death among 15- to 29-year-olds[35]

Know the 12 Warning Signs of Suicide, and How to Help

While some are better at keeping their depression and any thoughts of suicide well hidden, even from the ones they love, it's important for everyone to recognize the warning signs, and what they can do to help. According to the CDC, the 12 warning signs that someone may be contemplating or getting close to suicide are:[36]

- Feeling like a burden
- Being isolated
- Increased anxiety
- Feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Increased substance use
- Looking for a way to access lethal means
- Increased anger or rage
- Extreme mood swings
- Expressing hopelessness
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Talking or posting about wanting to die

- Making plans for suicide

If you notice one or more of these signs, take the following five steps to help. For more information about how to prevent suicide, see **bethe1to.com**.

1. Ask how they are feeling and if they are considering ending their life, or if they have a plan to do so
2. Don't let them be alone and do your best to keep them safe
3. Make yourself available to them
4. Reach out to them daily and help them connect to others
5. Follow up

If you live in the U.S. and are having thoughts of suicide, call or text 988 to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (formerly the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), or chat online at 988lifeline.org.[37,38] Veterans can press 1 after dialing 988, Spanish speakers can press 2, and LGBTQ+ youth can press 3 for specialized support.[39,40] You can also text HOME (or HOLA for Spanish) to 741741 to reach the Crisis Text Line.[41] If you are in danger of acting on suicidal thoughts, call 911 for immediate assistance.

Depression Is Not the Sole Cause of Suicide

An important, yet frequently overlooked contributor to depression and other neuropsychiatric disorders is EMF exposure. In 2016, Martin Pall, Ph.D., wrote a magnificent and comprehensive review on this that is available for free online.[42] He reviews how regular exposure to low intensity microwaves, like those from your cellphone and Wi-Fi, impact your nervous system. There are even two U.S. government reports that detail this.

It's also important to realize that depression or other mental illness is not the sole cause of suicide. More than half of those who commit suicide do not have a known mental health condition, according to CDC data. As noted by Julie Beck in her thoughtful article, "When Will People Get Better at Talking About Suicide,"[43] published by The Atlantic, "The traumas and losses of people's lives and the ways they respond to them are infinitely varied and context-dependent. And that makes suicide hard to talk about."

And yet we need to, if we are to save each other from needless tragedy. According to the CDC, contributing factors to suicide in 2015 included the following:[44]

- Relationship problems (42%)
- A crisis in the past or upcoming two weeks (29%)
- Substance abuse (28%)
- A physical health problem (22%)
- Work or financial problem (16%)
- Criminal or legal problem (9%)
- Loss of housing (4%)

Antidepressants Are Not a Satisfactory Answer

According to the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, 11% of Americans over the age of 12 are on antidepressant drugs. Among women in their 40 and 50s, 1 in 4 is on antidepressants,[45] the side effects of which run the gamut from loss of libido to emotional flatness, restlessness, sleep disturbances, brain damage, and suicidal and/or homicidal ideation.

Antidepressants can also harm your immune system, and raise your risk of Type 2 diabetes by two to three times in high-risk groups.[46] These side effects are all the more significant by the fact that there is very little evidence to suggest antidepressants

benefit people with mild to moderate depression. In fact, researchers have found they work no better than a placebo in 80% of cases.[47,48]

What's worse, long-term use of antidepressants may also cause you to develop bipolar disorder or other types of psychoses,[49,50] which means you'll need to graduate to a new or additional medication, often an antipsychotic drug that blocks dopamine receptors in your brain.

There are safer, and in many cases better, alternatives. Many of the basics have been covered in a variety of previous articles on depression and its treatment. In the following sections, you'll find summary compilations of lifestyle strategies and nutritional interventions that have been shown to be beneficial. Also know that while these lists are extensive, they're not exhaustive.

Key Dietary Considerations and Helpful Nutritional Supplements

- **Eat a healthy whole food diet and avoid processed foods and junk food —** One of the first steps in addressing problems like anxiety and depression is to clean up your diet and address your gut health. Otherwise, you'll have virtually no chance of getting healthy emotionally and mentally. Foods have an immense impact on your mood and ability to cope and be happy, and eating whole foods will support your mental health.

  Avoiding added sugars and seed oils, which processed foods are loaded with, will also help normalize your insulin and leptin levels, which is another powerful tool in addressing depression.

- **Go gluten-free —** The gluten level in our grains is much higher today than it ever was before, thanks to various breeding techniques, and gluten can produce depression if you're sensitive to it. In such a case, the key is to remove gluten from your diet entirely.

- **Optimize your vitamin D level —** Making sure you're getting enough sunlight exposure to have a healthy vitamin D level is also a crucial factor in treating depression or keeping it at bay. Vitamin D deficiency is actually more the norm than the exception, and has previously been implicated in both psychiatric and neurological disorders. One previous study found that people with the lowest levels of vitamin D were 11 times more prone to be depressed than those who had normal levels.

- **Balance your gut microbiome —** Unbalanced gut flora has also been identified as a significant contributing factor to depression, so be sure to optimize your gut health, either by regularly eating traditionally fermented foods or taking a high-quality probiotic.

- **St. John's wort —** St. John's wort is commonly used for the treatment of depression. It is available in tablets, capsules and liquid form. Research suggests it exerts its antidepressant action by inhibiting the reuptake of the neurotransmitters serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine.

  Numerous double-blind, placebo-controlled studies have examined the effectiveness of St. John's wort for the treatment of mild to moderate major depression, and most have found the herb more effective than a placebo. It can be at least as effective as paroxetine (Paxil) in the treatment of moderate to severe depression in the short term.

- **S-Adenosylmethionine (SAMe) —** SAMe is an amino acid derivative that occurs naturally in all cells. It plays a role in many biological reactions by transferring its methyl group to DNA, proteins, phospholipids and biogenic amines. Several scientific studies indicate that SAMe may be useful in the treatment of depression.

- **5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) —** 5-HTP is another natural alternative to traditional antidepressants. When your body sets about manufacturing serotonin, it first makes 5-HTP, so taking 5-HTP as a supplement helps raise your serotonin levels.

Downstream, it also boosts production of melatonin, so taking it shortly before bedtime can help improve your sleep.

- **B vitamins, including B1, B2, B6, B8, B9, and B12 —** B vitamins play a role in the production of certain neurotransmitters that are important for mood regulation and other brain functions. Folic acid (vitamin B9) deficiency has been noted among people with depression, as has pyridoxine (B6) deficiency. Pyridoxine is the cofactor for enzymes that convert L-tryptophan to serotonin.

  There's also evidence that people with depression respond better to treatment if they have higher levels of vitamin B12, while high doses of niacin (vitamin B3) are particularly important for schizophrenic patients. It turns out that pellagra, a disorder caused by niacin deficiency, produces the same psychiatric symptoms, such as irrational anger, feelings of persecution, mania and dementia, found in many schizophrenic patients.

  One 2017 study[51,52,53] found high doses of vitamins B6, B8 (inositol) and B12 in combination were very effective for improving schizophrenic symptoms — more so than standard drug treatments alone, and particularly when implemented early on. Low doses were ineffective.

  Aside from schizophrenia, researchers have found niacin can be successfully used in the treatment of general psychosis, anxiety, depression and obsessive-compulsive disorder. B12 deficiency can also trigger mania, psychosis and paranoid delusions.[54,55]

  One of the reasons for B vitamins' effect on a wide range of mood disorders and neurological and psychiatric conditions relates to the fact that these vitamins have a direct impact on the methylation cycle, and are required for the production and function of neurotransmitters and the maintenance of myelin, the fatty sheath surrounding your nerve cells.

  Without this protective coating, nerve signals become slow and sporadic, which can lead to motor function problems, cognitive losses and changes in mood.

B8 also aids in cell communication, allowing your cells to properly interpret chemical messages and respond accordingly.[56] Meanwhile, B6, folate and B12 (in combination with S-adenosylmethionine or SAMe) regulate the synthesis and breakdown of brain chemicals involved in mood control, including serotonin, melatonin and dopamine. Hence, a deficiency in one or more of these B vitamins can also play a role in depression.

- **Address hormonal imbalances —** Perimenopause and other hormonal imbalances are frequently misdiagnosed as depression. Women are now entering perimenopause at younger ages these days; some even before the age of 40, and this phase can last for years. Women who have never had PMS may suddenly experience rather severe symptoms, feeling depressed, moody and irritable.

  An antidepressant is not going to solve the problem in this case. Rather, you need to balance your hormones. Basics include a nutritious diet and detoxification to ensure proper liver function. Milk thistle or bupleurum are herbs that can help with this. Other herbs like dong quai and black cohosh may be helpful against menopausal and PMS symptoms.

  Bioidentical hormones such as progesterone are another option that may or may not be necessary depending on your situation. Once you hit on the right combination, symptoms will typically recede within two menstrual cycles.

Lifestyle Strategies That Help Combat Anxiety and Depression Without Drugs

- **Exercise regularly —** Exercise, including strength training, is clearly one of the best-kept secrets for depression. In one study, which involved adults diagnosed with mild to moderate depression, researchers looked at exercise alone to treat the condition and found:

  - After 12 weeks, depressive symptoms were cut almost in half in those who participated in 30-minute aerobic exercise sessions, three to five times a week

- Those who exercised at low-intensity for three and five days a week showed a 30% reduction in symptoms
- Participants who did stretching and flexibility exercises 15 to 20 minutes three days a week averaged a 29% decline in depressive symptoms

- **Address stress and unresolved emotional conflicts —** Like so many other families, I have been personally affected by depression. My mother suffered from this problem for a time, and made several unsuccessful suicide attempts that really devastated me.

  This occurred just as I was making the transition into energy medicine, so initially she was treated with medications. However, the medications and inpatient care were a terrible failure. Ultimately, it was energetic techniques that helped her fully recover from her depression.

  Learning how to use an energy psychology tool like the Emotional Freedom Techniques can make an enormous difference if you suffer from depression or any other kind of emotional dysfunction. This energy psychology tool is one of the most powerful methods I know of, and is a crucial element of any successful treatment program. In the video below, EFT practitioner Julie Schiffman demonstrates how to use this technique for depression.

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) —** CBT helps you change how you think about things and has been used successfully to treat depression.[57] In fact, several clinical studies have demonstrated that CBT is as effective as antidepressant medication. Within 20 sessions of individual therapy, approximately 75% of patients experience a significant decrease in their symptoms.

  Unlike more traditional forms of therapy, CBT focuses on "here and now" problems and difficulties, and is a recommended treatment for depression triggered by the stress of moving from one culture and country to another.[58] In this case, the therapy assumes mood is related to the pattern of thought. CBT attempts to change mood and reverse depression by directing thought patterns.

- **Light Therapy —** For years, light therapy has been used to treat seasonal affective disorder, a type of depression caused by short winter days and extended darkness. A lack of exposure to sunlight is responsible for the secretion of the hormone melatonin, which can trigger a dispirited mood and a lethargic condition. Light therapy helps to regulate the body's internal clock in the same way that sunlight does.

  Light therapy is an effective treatment for seasonal affective disorder, and may reduce symptoms of nonseasonal and major depression as well.

- **Minimize EMF exposure —** Excessive free radicals triggered by low-frequency microwave exposure from wireless technologies have been linked to anxiety and depression, so take precautions to minimize unnecessary exposure. For example, avoid carrying your cellphone on your body, and never sleep with it next to your head or beneath your pillow. Also do not allow your children to sleep with their phones. To learn more, see "The Real Dangers of Electronic Devices and EMFs."

- **Massage —** One of the best-known benefits of massage therapy is its ability to enhance feelings of well-being. Massage therapy lowers levels of stress hormone cortisol by an average of 30%, while increasing serotonin and dopamine, neurotransmitters that help reduce depression.

- **Acupuncture —** Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese treatment in which needles are inserted at specific points in the body. A review of eight controlled trials supported the theory that acupuncture can significantly reduce the severity of depression.

- **Yoga —** Yoga is an ancient system of relaxation, exercise and healing with origins in Indian philosophy, and has been shown to alter your brain chemistry. Some yoga positions are effective in stimulating the release of endorphins and reducing the level of stress hormone cortisol. Several human studies support the use of yoga for depression, and yoga postures have been specifically shown to increase levels of the neurotransmitter gamma-amino butyric acid (GABA), which may alleviate depression.

In one study,[59,60] researchers studied the effect of Iyengar yoga classes on participants diagnosed with major depressive disorder who were either not taking medication or had been on the same medication for three months.[61]

One group was assigned to take a 90-minute yoga class three times a week, plus participate in a 30-minute session at home four times a week. The second group participated in two 90-minute classes and three 30-minute at home sessions.

After three months both groups experienced a reduction in symptoms by at least 50%, with no differences in compliance.[62] The group who participated seven days a week experienced the greatest reduction in symptoms.

Other research has linked these improvements to changes in GABA, an amino acid that acts as a neurotransmitter in your central nervous system. GABA is responsible for blocking nerve impulses, telling the adjoining nerve cells not to "fire" or send an impulse. Without **GABA** your nerve cells would fire frequently and easily, triggering anxiety disorders, seizures and conditions such as addiction, headache and cognitive impairments.[63]

- **Biofeedback and progressive muscle relaxation —** **Biofeedback** and progressive muscle relaxation may help to reduce stress levels and, therefore, address a primary environmental trigger for depression.

  In biofeedback, electrical sensors attached to your skin allow you to monitor your biological changes, such as heart rate, and this feedback can help you achieve a deeper state of relaxation. It can also teach you to control your heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension through your mind.

  Biofeedback is commonly used in the treatment of stress related conditions such as migraine and tension headaches, fibromyalgia, depression and anxiety. Progressive muscle relaxation may achieve the same level of stress reduction through tensing and relaxing all the major muscle groups from head to toe, thereby helping you to recognize muscle tension.

- **Visualization —** Visualization and guided imagery have been used for decades by elite athletes prior to an event, successful business people and cancer patients — all to achieve better results through convincing your mind you have already achieved successful results.[64,65] Similar success has been found in people with depression.[66]

- **Spend time in nature and/or listen to nature sounds —** Both have been shown to alleviate anxiety and depression. To learn more, see "**Nature Heals**," and "**Science Reveals Why Nature Sounds and Deep Breathing Are so Relaxing**."

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