

# Major Depressive Disorder

When Persistent Sadness Drives the Need to Self-Medicate



## What is Major Depressive Disorder?

**Major Depressive Disorder** is a mental health condition marked by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest in activities that once brought joy. People with MDD experience episodes lasting weeks or months, making daily functioning feel impossible without relief.

## What Does it Look Like?

- > **Withdrawal from Life**  
They stop showing up for family events, work, and activities they used to care about.
- > **Persistent Hopelessness**  
Nothing seems worth the effort, and conversations about the future are met with resignation.
- > **Sleep and Energy Disruption**  
They're exhausted all the time, sleeping too much or barely at all.
- > **Irritability and Isolation**  
Small frustrations become major conflicts, and they pull away from the people closest to them.

## How Does MDD Contribute to Relapse?

For someone with MDD, the weight of daily life feels crushing. Substances offer the only quick escape from the relentless pain of feeling nothing at all.

- 1) **Substances Provide Quick Relief**  
Alcohol or drugs help to quiet the relentless internal noise.
- 2) **Short-Term Programs Can't Address the Depth**  
Managing chronic anxiety requires them to build new neural pathways and coping skills, which takes time.
- 3) **Without Treating MDD, the Despair Remains**  
They leave treatment and return to the same darkness that drove them to use in the first place.

### Prevalence:

**8.3%** of U.S. adults<sup>1</sup>

### Co-Occurrence:

**25%** develop a substance use disorder in their lifetime<sup>2</sup>

### Relapse Risk:

**2x** more likely to have SUDs than those without depression<sup>3</sup>

Sources: <sup>1</sup> NIMH, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2021)*. <sup>2</sup> Hunt et al., *Journal of Affective Disorders (2020)*. <sup>3</sup> PMC, *Mood Disorders and Substance Use Disorder*.

## Long-Term Treatment for MDD and Addiction

MDD creates a fundamental barrier to recovery: motivation. Someone who cannot see a future worth living for lacks the drive to sustain sobriety through difficult moments. They need extended time to rebuild a sense of purpose while developing new coping strategies.

Our **long-term, progress-based model** provides the consistent structure that MDD demands. Clients advance through the program when they demonstrate genuine changes in how they engage with life and manage their emotions.



*“The emptiness they feel is real. Substances fill that void temporarily. Real treatment means helping them build a life that feels worth protecting.”*

 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**  
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



## Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Major Depressive Disorder

When MDD and addiction occur together, treating only one leads to relapse. Depression drains the motivation needed for recovery, and substance use deepens the hopelessness of depression.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**  
Without treating MDD, the emotional drivers of substance use remain.
- **Rebuilding a Sense of Purpose**  
Treatment must help them rediscover meaning and purpose in life.
- **Providing Enough Time**  
Depression patterns develop over years. Changing them takes more than a few weeks.

### Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



### Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at [www.BurningTree.com](http://www.BurningTree.com).

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