

Depression

Depression

If you are depressed, you may feel that nothing can help. But this is not true: deciding to do something about it is the most important step you can take.

Most people recover from bouts of depression, and some even look back on it as a useful experience which forced them to take stock of their lives and make changes to their lifestyle.

What is depression?

Depression is more than simply feeling unhappy or fed up for a few days. We all have spells of feeling down, but when you are medically depressed, you feel sad for weeks or months rather than just a few days.

Depression is not trivial. It is a real illness with real symptoms and it is not a sign of weakness or something you can 'snap out of' by 'pulling yourself together'. Depression lowers your mood, and can make you feel hopeless, worthless, unmotivated and exhausted. It can affect sleep, appetite, libido and self-esteem. It can also interfere with daily activities and, sometimes, your physical health. This may set off a vicious cycle, because the worse you feel, the more depressed you are likely to get, and so on.

Depression can come on gradually and so you may not have noticed that something is wrong. Many people continue to try to cope with their symptoms without realising that they are ill; it can take a friend or family member to suggest that something is wrong.

Doctors describe depression by how serious the effects are:

1. Mild depression has some impact on your daily life. By recognising and treating the symptoms and getting help, it is possible to overcome depression, and prevent it coming back.
2. Moderate depression has a significant impact on your daily life
3. Severe depression makes it almost impossible to get through daily life. A few people with severe depression may have psychotic symptoms.

If you experience five or more of these symptoms for most of the day, every day, for more than two weeks, the chances are you are experiencing depression and should seek help from your GP:

Psychological symptoms

- a continuous low mood or sadness
- feeling numb, empty and helpless
- experiencing a sense of unreality
- being preoccupied with negative thoughts;

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- taking a bleak, pessimistic view of the future
- lacking self-confidence and self-esteem
- feeling tearful; crying a lot
- blaming yourself and feeling unnecessarily guilty about things
- being unusually irritable, impatient and intolerant of others
- no motivation or interest in things
- difficulty in concentrating, remembering things and making decisions
- getting no pleasure out of life or what you usually enjoy
- suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself
- feeling anxious or worried, restless and agitated.

Physical symptoms

- moving or speaking more slowly than usual
- changes in appetite or weight (usually decreased, but sometimes increased)
- constipation
- physical aches and pains with no physical cause
- feeling tired and lacking energy; doing less and less
- losing interest in sex
- changes in the menstrual cycle
- disturbed sleep (for example, finding it hard to fall asleep at night or waking up very early in the morning), or sleeping more
- self-harming (by cutting yourself, for example)

Social symptoms

- not doing well at work
- taking part in fewer social activities and avoiding contact with your friends

- distancing yourself from others; not asking for support
- neglecting hobbies and interests
- having difficulties in your home and family life
- using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual.

Grief and depression

You may find it hard to distinguish between grief and depression. They share many of the same characteristics, but there are important differences between them. Grief is an entirely natural response to a loss, while depression is an illness. If you are grieving, you will find your feelings of loss and sadness come and go, but you are still able to enjoy things and look forward to the future. If you are depressed you will have a constant feeling of sadness. You will not be able to enjoy anything, and you will find it hard to be positive about the future.

Postnatal depression

Some women develop depression after having a baby. The symptoms are similar to those of clinical depression, but sufferers may also experience some of the following:

- a sense of inadequacy – feeling unable to cope
- feeling guilty about not coping, or about not loving the baby enough
- being hostile or indifferent to your husband or partner
- being hostile or indifferent to your baby
- obsessive fears about the baby's health or wellbeing, or about yourself and other members of the family.

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Bipolar disorder (also known as 'manic depression')

Bipolar disorder consists of spells of depression and also of excessively high mood (mania). The depression symptoms are similar to those of clinical depression, and the bouts of mania can include harmful and risky behaviour such as gambling, going on spending sprees and having unsafe sex. Bipolar can vary considerably: some people have very few bipolar disorder episodes, with years of stability in between them; others experience many more. The episodes can vary in both length and frequency from days to months, with varying lengths of time in between.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

Also known as 'winter depression', SAD is a type of depression that has a seasonal pattern usually related to winter. The symptoms are essentially the same as those listed above, but for those with SAD, the changes in mood and behaviour are much more severe, and happen regularly, each winter.

Who is affected by depression?

Depression is quite common and affects about one in ten of us at some point. It affects men and

women, both young and old. Children can also get depression: studies have shown that about 4% of children aged 5-16 in the UK are affected by depression.

Depression can sometimes be triggered by events in your life, especially life-changing ones such as bereavement, losing your job, or even fortunate ones like having a baby. If you have a family history of depression you are also more likely to experience depression. But you can also become depressed for no obvious reason. There are all sorts of causes.

Do I have depression?

We often say, 'I'm feeling depressed' when we are feeling a bit sad or miserable about life, but these feelings should pass in due course. If feelings like this are interfering with your life and do not go away after a couple of weeks, or if they come back over and over again, it could be a sign that you are depressed in the medical sense of the term.

Depression shows itself in many different ways. Often people with depression do not realise it because their problems seem to be physical, not mental. There is a detailed list of symptoms associated with depression in our Guide to the Symptoms of Depression. The more of these symptoms that you have, the more likely it is that you are depressed. The NHS also has a short online test which could help you find out if you are depressed.

How serious is depression?

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The symptoms of depression can vary in severity. At its mildest, you may simply feel low most of the time. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening, making you feel suicidal and that life is no longer worth living.

Should I see a doctor?

If you think you may be depressed, it is really important to see your GP. You may find it hard to imagine that treatment can actually help. But the sooner you seek treatment, the sooner your feelings of depression can be alleviated.

How will the doctor diagnose depression?

There are no physical tests for depression, though your GP may examine you and do some blood or urine tests to rule out other conditions that have similar symptoms, such as an underactive thyroid.

The main way in which your GP will tell if you have depression is by asking you lots of questions about your general health and how the way you are feeling affects you mentally and physically. Try to be as open as you can with the doctor. Describing your symptoms and how they are affecting you will really help your GP understand if you have depression and how severe it is.

Any discussion you have with your GP about your depression will be confidential. Your GP will only ever break this rule if there is a significant risk of harm to either yourself or to others, and if informing a family member or carer would reduce that risk.

How is depression treated?

Doctors treat depression through medication or what is called talking treatments, or most usually a combination of the two. The kind of treatment that your doctor recommends will be based on the type of depression you have, and could include the following:

Wait and see

If you are diagnosed with mild depression, your depression may improve by itself. In this case, you will simply be seen again by your GP after two weeks to monitor your progress. This is known as watchful waiting.

Exercise

Exercise has been proven to help depression, and is one of the main treatments if you have mild depression. Your GP may refer you to a qualified fitness trainer for an exercise scheme or you can consider getting started yourself. Self-Help Groups You may find that talking through your feelings can be helpful. Of course you can talk to a friend or relative but your GP will also be able to suggest a local self-help group. There are also many books on self-help, and your GP may be able to recommend one to you.

Talking Therapy

If you have mild depression that is not improving, or you have moderate depression, your GP may recommend a talking treatment. There are different types of talking therapy for depression including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling. These types of therapy may also be available online. Your GP can refer you for talking treatment or, in some parts of the country you might be able to refer yourself.

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Antidepressants

Your doctor may prescribe you with antidepressants. These are typically tablets that treat the symptoms of depression. There are almost 30 different kinds of antidepressant and they have to be prescribed by a doctor. They will usually only prescribe antidepressants for depression that is moderate or severe.

Combination Therapy

Your GP may recommend that you take a course of antidepressants plus talking therapy, particularly if your depression is quite severe. A combination of an antidepressant and talking therapy usually works better than having just one of these treatments. Mental Health Teams. If you have severe depression, you may be referred to a mental health team made up of psychologists, psychiatrists, specialist nurses and occupational therapists. These teams often provide intensive specialist talking treatments alongside prescribed medication.

Living with depression

You may find your depression is improved if you make lifestyle changes such as getting more exercise, cutting down on alcohol and even eating more healthily. You may also find that self-help measures such as reading a self-help book or joining a support group are also worthwhile.

Try to recognise any pattern of negative thinking at the time when you are doing it, and consciously replace it with a more constructive activity. Look for things to do that occupy your mind.

You should actively do things that will improve the way you feel about yourself. Allow yourself

positive experiences and treats that reinforce the idea that you deserve good things. Pay attention to what you wear and your personal appearance in general such as your haircut, looking after your teeth by going to the dentist, etc. Set yourself goals that you can easily achieve and that will give you a sense of satisfaction.

Medication

As you start to feel better, it is important to continue to take the medication that you have been prescribed. If you stop your medication too soon, you could have a relapse of your depression.

If you have any questions or concerns about the medication that you are taking, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. You may find it helpful to read the information leaflet that comes with your medication to find out about possible interactions with other drugs or supplements. If you plan to take any over-the-counter remedies, such as painkillers, or any nutritional supplements, check with your doctor first, as these can sometimes interfere with antidepressants.

Exercise

If you can take more exercise this can make a tremendous difference to how quickly you recover from depression. You will also improve your general health. Although you may not feel like it, it is very therapeutic to take part in physical activities, even for 20 minutes a day. It could be not only playing sports, but also running, dancing, cycling, or brisk walking. All of these activities will have a positive effect. There is research that suggests that exercise can be as effective as antidepressants at reducing the symptoms of depression. Your mood is lifted when you are physically active and it reduces

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stress and anxiety. It also boosts the release of endorphins (your body's feel-good chemicals) and improves your self-esteem. Exercising to help depression is therefore an important step that you can take.

Diet

Another way to improve your mood is to ensure that you have a healthy diet. In fact, eating healthily seems to be just as important for maintaining your mental health as it is for preventing physical health problems and will be able to confide in them. Remember, you are under no obligation to make your mind up there and then. Take as much time as you need over your decision. Make sure that you are eating enough fruit, vegetables and other fresh food. Oily fish, in particular, may help alleviate depression. Try to cut down on tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, as these can make depression worse.

Self Help Groups

It can be an enormous relief to meet and share experiences with other people who are going through the same things that you are. This can break down feelings of isolation and, at the same time, show you how other people have coped. Finding that you can in your turn support others can make you feel more positive and so help you too. These groups are often led by people who have overcome depression themselves. For help in locating local self-help groups, in the first instance talk to your GP.

Useful links

If you are experiencing any of the issues covered in this factsheet, in the first instance call our free helpline on **0808 801 0550**.

Our Advisors will listen without judging and will work with you as best they can to achieve a positive outcome. If you prefer you can email: helpline@ltcharity.org.uk Visit our website: www.licensedtradecharity.org.uk It's full of useful information about the kind of issues we know people who work in the licensed trade face.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk

This website has a good summary of the causes and treatment of depression, including a short video.



Mind

Mind Infoline: 0300 123 3393 or text 86463

www.mind.org.uk

This website has a very helpful and comprehensive discussion of depression, with a list of sources of help and further reading.



020 8 519 2122 Email: contact@mind.org.uk