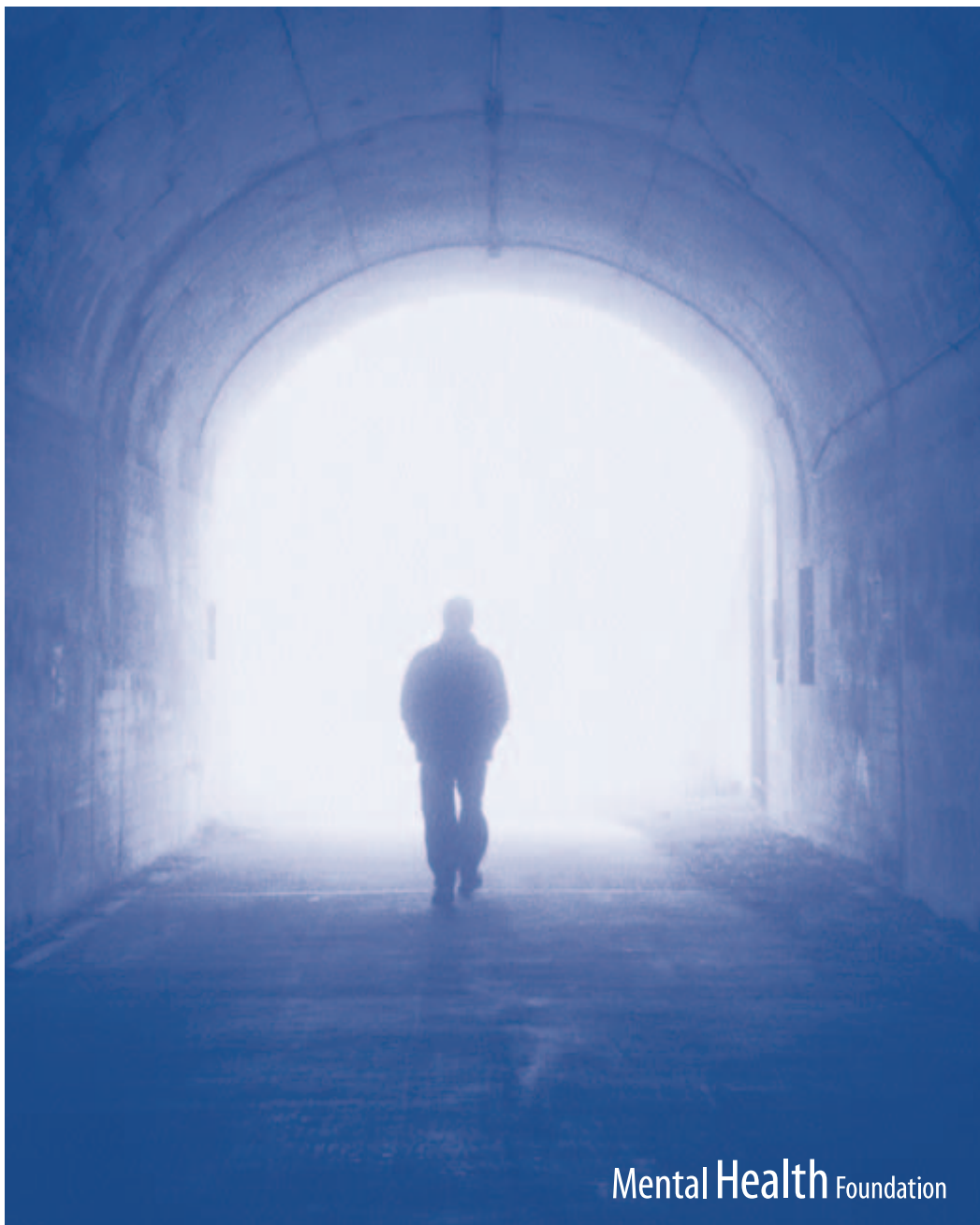


# Dealing with depression



# Dealing with depression

Every year, one person in ten will suffer from some form of depression.

**That's about 10% of the population.**

Depression is different from feeling down or sad. Unhappiness is something which everyone feels at one time or another, usually due to a particular cause. A person suffering from depression will experience intense emotions of anxiety, hopelessness, negativity and helplessness, and the feelings stay with them instead of going away.

Depression can happen to anyone. Many successful and famous people, who seem to have everything going for them, battle with this problem. Depression also affects people of every age.

Half of the people who have depression will only experience it once but for the other half it will happen again. The length of time that it takes to recover ranges from around 6 months to a year or more.

Living with depression is difficult for those who suffer from it and for their family, friends and colleagues. It can be difficult to know if you are depressed and what you can do about it.

This booklet aims to:

- help you recognise symptoms of depression,
- give you information and advice about things that you can do to try to manage feelings of depression,
- help you to decide the best options for dealing with your depression,
- offer information for family and friends.

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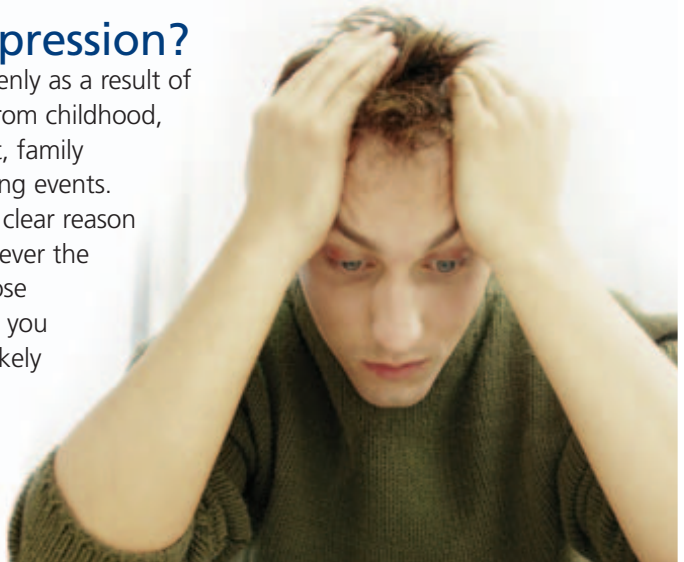
# Signs and symptoms of depression

The following are the most common symptoms of depression. If you experience four or more of the symptoms listed below, for most of the day, every day for more than two weeks, you should seek help from your GP.

- Tiredness and loss of energy
- Sadness that does not go away
- Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem
- Difficulty concentrating
- Not being able to enjoy things that are usually pleasurable or interesting
- Feeling anxious all the time
- Avoiding other people, sometimes even your close friends
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Sleeping problems - difficulties in getting off to sleep or waking up much earlier than usual
- Very strong feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Finding it hard to function at work/college/school
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of sex drive and/or sexual problems
- Physical aches and pains
- Thinking about suicide and death
- Self-harm

## What causes depression?

Depression can happen suddenly as a result of physical illness, experiences from childhood, unemployment, bereavement, family problems or other life changing events. Sometimes, there may be no clear reason for your depression but whatever the original cause, identifying those things which may affect how you feel and the things that are likely to trigger depression is an important first step.



# Types of depression

There are several types of depression, some of which are listed below.

## Mild depression

Depression is described as mild when it has a negative but limited effect on your daily life, for example, you may have difficulty concentrating at work or motivating yourself to do the things you normally enjoy. It is described as more severe when it has a major impact on everyday life, such as being unable to work or look after yourself, or needing to be hospitalised.

## Major depression

Major depression interferes with an individual's ability to cope with their daily life; with eating, sleeping and many other everyday activities. Some people may experience only one episode but several episodes in a lifetime is more common. Recognising the signs that indicate an episode is very useful as it means the person can seek help earlier. Sometimes, there may not be an obvious cause.

## Bipolar (Manic) depression

The mood swings which define bipolar depression can be extreme. These range from highs – where the individual feels extremely elated and indestructible; to lows – where they may experience despair and lethargy. Sometimes there will also be severe symptoms where the person cannot make sense of their world and does things that seem odd or illogical. Bipolar depression is a long term illness.

## Post-natal depression

Many new mothers experience what are sometimes called “baby blues” a few days after the birth. But these feelings of anxiety and a lack of confidence are unlikely to last more than a couple of weeks. Post-natal depression is more intense and lasts longer. It can leave new mothers feeling inadequate, completely overwhelmed and unable to cope. They may have problems sleeping, panic attacks or an intense fear of dying. They may also experience negative feelings towards their child. **It affects one in ten mothers and usually begins two to three weeks after the birth.**

## Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

This type of depression is associated with the start of winter and can last until spring when longer days bring more daylight. When it is mild, it is sometimes called “winter blues”. SAD can make the sufferer feel anxious, stressed and depressed. It may interfere with their moods and with their sleeping and eating patterns.

# Taking control of your depression

Depression often makes you feel helpless. Taking action to make yourself feel more in control will have a positive effect, whether it's going to see your GP for treatment, joining the local gym, or doing something that you are interested in or good at. If you don't feel up to starting something new or joining a local group on your own, ask a friend if they will join with you.

**There are many things you can do to help manage your symptoms yourself and a wide range of treatments, both medical and non-medical, available through your GP.** The sections below should help you to work out what you could be doing yourself and what information or support you may want to ask your GP about.

## How you see yourself

The way you think about yourself will affect your frame of mind and feelings of depression. It is common to have feelings of worthlessness or guilt with depression. Try to be aware of any negative thoughts you have about yourself and how they might be affecting how you see yourself and how you feel. If you can, try to think about how realistic these thoughts are and how you might change them into something more positive. You can speak to your GP practice about counselling.

## Social networks

If you feel depressed it can be difficult to be sociable. Feeling alone may make you feel worse, so it's important to keep in touch with friends and family. Having people around you or groups that you are involved with will help to reduce feelings of isolation.

If you do not have many social networks you could find out about local community groups or befriending schemes by contacting your local library or speaking to your GP surgery.

## Worries about work, money or a legal situation

Making sure that you do not feel overwhelmed by your work responsibilities is important because it gives you a sense of being in control. It's important to make time for yourself so that you have space to do things you want to do or to be with friends and family. If you are struggling to cope with work pressures and you have access to an occupational health department, you can speak to them about how you are feeling. They may be able to help you to review your work commitments or address specific issues that are affecting your work.

If you are having financial difficulties, speak to your local **Citizens Advice Bureau** about how you might get financial help. Find your local bureau in the phonebook or online at [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk).

The **National Debtline** on **0808 808 4000** provides free, confidential and independent advice for people with debt problems. If you are out of work or want to change your job, your local job centre [www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) may offer support in finding work.

Both the Citizens Advice Bureau and your local social services department can also help you with advice about benefits if you are unemployed or perhaps unable to work because of depression. But, where possible, you should always try to keep working as people with depression often find that this is very helpful. Seeing other colleagues, having some routine to the day, and the sense of achievement in getting a job done, can all be beneficial.

## Close relationships

Experiencing problems with close personal relationships can have a devastating effect on how you feel about yourself and the world. If you are struggling to cope with a difficult relationship or your depression is causing problems in your relationship you can contact **Relate** at [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk) or on **0845 456 1310** (this marriage guidance group also helps couples who are not married) or you could speak to your GP or practice nurse about getting support and help through other forms of relationship counselling.

## Physical activity

There is good evidence that exercise can lift your mood because it can take your mind off your depression as well as stimulate the release of endorphins in the brain. Endorphins are chemicals that make you feel happier.

If you have mild or moderate depression your GP might recommend an exercise referral scheme. Ideally you should be aiming for 50 minutes of exercise 3-5 times a week. You can break this time down into more manageable amounts so that you can fit it into your everyday life.

**If you want advice about what exercise you should be doing and how it might help your depression, speak to your GP or practice nurse.**

## **Diet**

Some studies have suggested a link between what you eat and depression, but there isn't enough conclusive evidence to say whether or not it can definitely make a difference. One suggestion is that foods which are rich in some essential fatty acids found in oily fish, like salmon, help to relieve some depressive symptoms. Whether there is a direct link or not, eating healthily will help you generally feel better and give you more energy, especially if you are also exercising.

## **Avoiding too much alcohol and drugs**

Alcohol acts as a depressant on the brain and if you drink too much or too often, you are more likely to become depressed. If you are already suffering from depression, drinking alcohol can make you feel worse instead of better. With such a vicious circle it is best to drink moderately, if at all. Recreational drugs should also be avoided.

## **Managing anxiety**

Around half of those people who experience depression will also experience anxiety. Taking steps to manage your anxiety can help to give you the mental space to begin to deal with your depression. Talking about the things that are making you anxious, as well as a healthy diet and exercising, will all help you to stay in control of anxiety. Some people, especially those with mild depression, find that relaxation techniques such as massage and yoga help them to feel less anxious.

## **Complementary medicine**

There is some evidence that St John's Wort can help with mild to moderate depression. However, this drug is known to interact with other substances so you need to get advice from a pharmacist or other health professional before taking it.

## **Getting help**

The first step in getting treatment will normally be to visit your GP practice. They will ask you a number of questions about how your depression is affecting you mentally and physically.

The first appointment can feel difficult so it might be helpful if you write down what you have been experiencing before you go. Make a note of any questions or worries you might have. Some people find it helpful to bring a friend or family member.



It is important for both you and your doctor to be happy with decisions about your treatment. Being as open as you can about your symptoms and how they are affecting you will really help. Your GP may suggest you see a specialist such as a mental health nurse, psychiatrist or psychologist.

**For mild depression**, medication is not recommended because the risks could outweigh the benefits. Your GP has guidelines for treating depression and these recommend waiting to see if the depression goes away. Using some of the self-help ideas mentioned above can help and your GP surgery can offer you support.

Talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) work well for depression but they are in short supply in some areas and you may have to wait to see someone on the NHS. You can pay to see someone privately and your GP may be able to recommend someone. (See **Talking Therapies** on following page.)

**For more severe depression** your GP will probably recommend antidepressants. Antidepressants do work but they have side effects. A combination of talking therapies and antidepressants will often be the most effective approach for more severe depression.

## About medication

Medication will not always be the first choice, especially if your depression is mild. There are a number of medications available which work in different ways and will be prescribed depending on the type and severity of depression you have.

If one medication does not work you may be prescribed something else, however **it takes a few weeks before your medicine starts to work** so your GP will want to ensure that you allow enough time to see if it is going to be effective.

It is important that you take the medicine for the period of time recommended by your GP because if you come off your medicine too soon (even if you feel better) this can lead to a relapse where the depression returns. As a rough guide, you will usually have to remain on treatment for at least six to nine months and in many cases it could be longer. You need to **work with your GP when you are coming off your medicine** as it can be harmful if this is done too quickly.

There are a number of different types of antidepressants available. Some are used for particular types of symptoms and some are newer than others. Your GP can explain which they believe is the best for you and why. **Remember if you experience problems taking your medicine or have any concerns, speak to your GP.**

# About talking therapies

Talking therapies work by exploring the underlying causes of your depression. They can help you work out what caused it in the first place, what keeps you feeling depressed and ways of making things better. There is evidence that some talking therapies work. However, there may be a waiting list for seeing someone on the NHS. Your GP can advise you.

## Counselling

Counselling gives people the chance to talk through everyday issues that may be behind their depression, rather than trying to address more deep-rooted problems. The counsellor may sometimes provide practical advice on problems.

## Cognitive Therapy

Cognitive Therapy (sometimes called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or CBT) addresses the underlying causes of depression. It challenges the kinds of behaviour and thoughts which are causing you problems.

## Psychotherapies

These therapies are not always available on the NHS. The therapy is usually more frequent and intensive than counselling. It often looks at how past experience may be affecting your life now, so it may involve delving more deeply into early experiences and key relationships. Interpersonal therapy focuses on how you relate and behave towards others. It helps you to build a better self image and communicate more effectively with others.

Other talking therapies used to treat depression include: group therapy; family therapy; bibliotherapy, music and art therapy.

For more information on the best research evidence about the treatments for depression visit the British Medical Journal's Best Treatments website [www.besttreatments.co.uk](http://www.besttreatments.co.uk)



## Further information

### Association for Postnatal Illness

**020 7386 0868** [www.apni.org.uk](http://www.apni.org.uk)

145 Dawes Road, Fulham, London SW6 7EB  
Helpline provides support to mothers suffering from postnatal illness, or to friends or family who are concerned about someone.

### MDF The Bipolar Organisation

**08456 340 540** [www.mdf.org.uk](http://www.mdf.org.uk)

Castle Works, 21 St George's Road,  
London SE1 6ES  
Helps people affected by bipolar depression.

### Mental Health Foundation

**020 7803 1100** [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

Open 10am to 5pm, Monday to Friday  
Founded in 1949, the Mental Health Foundation uses research and practical projects to help people survive, recover from and prevent mental health problems. Provides information and free materials on a range of mental health issues for policy, professional and public audiences.

### Mind InfoLine

**08457 660 163 (local rate)**

Open 9.15am to 5.15pm, Monday to Friday  
Offers advice and support to service users; has network of local associations in England and Wales to which people can turn for help and assistance (details should be in local directories and libraries).

### NHS Direct

England and Wales - **0845 46 47**

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

Scotland - **0845 4 24 24 24**

[www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

### Rethink

**020 8974 6814** e-mail: [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

Open 10am to 3pm, Monday to Friday  
Information, advocacy plus a network of local groups and community services for people with severe mental illnesses and their carers.

### Samaritans

**08457 90 90 90 (local rate), 24 hours a day**

email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

web: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

24-hour helpline for those feeling distressed, despairing or suicidal, or those concerned about someone.

### Saneline

**0845 767 8000 (local rate)**

Lines are open 1pm – 11.00pm every day  
Offer support mainly for carers but also service users in crisis situations; can provide information on local services, treatment options, etc.

### Seasonal Affective Disorder

**Association** [www.sada.org.uk](http://www.sada.org.uk)

PO Box 989, Steyning, BN44 3HG

A voluntary organisation and registered charity which informs the public and health professions about SAD and supports and advises sufferers of the illness.

### Young Minds

**Parents Information Service**

**0800 018 2138** [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Mondays 10am-1pm, Tuesdays 1-4pm,

Wednesdays 1-4pm and 6-8pm,

Thursdays 1-4pm, Fridays 10am-1pm

Provide information and advice for anyone concerned about a child or young person's mental health.

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- give you information and advice about things that you can do to try to manage feelings of depression
- help you to decide the best options for dealing with your depression
- offer information for family and friends

If you have found this publication useful and would like to make a donation to the Mental Health Foundation, please contact us on 020 7803 1121 or visit [www.mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/get-involved)

To order additional copies of this booklet, call our publications orderline on 020 7803 1101 or email [mhf@mhf.org.uk](mailto:mhf@mhf.org.uk)

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For more information about mental health, visit: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

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