

# Depression

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## What is depression?

Depression can affect us all at different times of our lives to different degrees. When it starts to interfere with our daily activities and causes more distress, we need to find solutions to manage the problem.

All of us can feel upset or sad particularly when bad things happen. Our mood will be low for a short period, but we cope and feel better without treatment.

However, persistent sadness and low mood that lasts for more than two weeks is an important indicator that someone may be experiencing depression; in fact, most episodes of depression last several months.

Depression alters our behaviour both physically and emotionally and the way we think; it affects our ability to concentrate and enjoy relationships. When it is severe it affects our ability to care for ourselves day to day.

## How can we recognise depression?

Everyone experiences depression in different ways, as clinicians we consider depression if someone has had at least two of these symptoms for at least two weeks:

- Tiredness and lack of energy
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- An unusually sad mood that does not go away

People can also experience other symptoms including:

- Low self-esteem and loss of confidence
- Blaming themselves when they are not at fault
- Loss of concentration and difficulty making decisions
- Too much or too little sleep
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Feeling pessimistic, thoughts of suicide

Depression can take a while to develop and can similarly take time to resolve but people can get better with the right help.

## **What can we do about depression?**

There are several self-help strategies that can help people feel they are regaining control and doing something positive. These include the support of family/friends, mindfulness, exercise, diet, spending time in nature, and taking time to look after yourself and doing something you enjoy.

If self-help strategies are not working people may need to seek professional help, particularly when depression lasts for more than two weeks and has an adverse effect on day to day life and activities.

Your GP will explain about depression and will consider whether there is an underlying cause as well as looking into what might help; this might include any of the following:

- Referral to psychological therapies (counsellor) or a member of the community mental health team
- Signposting to self-help material
- Medication and monitoring

## **Counsellors/ Psychotherapists**

Counsellors and psychotherapists can help by listening and identifying coping strategies such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). A good counsellor will be registered with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). When people are depressed, they tend to think negatively about most things and develop unhelpful thinking patterns which can make them feel even more depressed. These thoughts and feelings may then cause them to act in a way that then reinforces thoughts and actions which support unhelpful thinking patterns. An example of this is someone feeling hopeless about friendships and thinking nobody cares causing them to withdraw from socialising and not being aware when someone tries to reach out to them.

Different types of antidepressants act in different ways, they are designed to work on the impulses in our brain and improve the way we function in terms of memory, thinking, concentration, attention, sights/sounds, how our limbs move, our mood, appetite and even body temperature. Your GP will discuss options and it may be helpful to try out different types before finding one that works.

## **How can we look after our wellbeing?**

In 2008 the New Economics Foundation created a set of actions people could use to support their own wellbeing throughout their life. They are called the Five Ways to Wellbeing and include:

### **Connect with other people**

Having good relationships with family, friends and colleagues helps to build a sense of belonging; investing in these relationships provides emotional support at home, school, the local community and in work.

### **Be active**

Exercise improves mental wellbeing by raising self-esteem and causing chemical changes which positively change our mood. Wellbeing is also improved by setting goals and achieving them.

### **Take notice (Mindfulness)**

Paying attention to your thoughts, feelings, your body, and the world helps us to enjoy life and understand ourselves better. It helps us to focus on the way we feel about life and how we go about the challenges we face.

### **Keep learning**

Learning something new boosts our self-confidence and self-esteem; it gives us a sense of purpose and helps us connect with others.

### **Give**

Being kind and giving, creates positive feelings and a sense of reward and helps to connect with other people.

You may also be interested to look at our [signposting](#) for further help with depression.

**Many employees with mental health issues struggle to see their doctor at a time and date that suits them and their employer. Workplace Wellness provides support to businesses to help their employees maintain good physical and mental health in the workplace. We offer an extensive range of services and are a team of doctors and nurses with a wide range of experience providing health care in both the NHS and private settings. Workplace Wellness can give you access to a doctor and nurse consultation either by telephone or secure video link. We offer support through early intervention and signposting.**

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Created November 2020