

## Coping with Depression

Everyone feels blue sometimes. However, when feelings of unhappiness linger over time and interfere with your ability to function and experience joy, you may have a depressive illness. With the right treatment and support, you can control the symptoms. Don't be afraid to seek help.

### Causes of Depression

Depression is a common medical condition that usually can be treated. Depression may be brought on by a stressful event, such as the death of a loved one, the loss of a job or problems in a marriage. A family history of depression, as well as alcohol and drug use, may increase your chances of becoming depressed.

A depressive disorder may also be caused by physiological factors that are often out of a person's control. Research shows that depression can be triggered by a chemical imbalance that causes neurotransmitters (which allow brain cells to communicate with each other) to not work properly. Though it is considered a psychiatric disorder, depression may manifest itself in physical symptoms.

Statistically, depression is more prevalent among women than men and among those who have suffered from previous depression. Depression can appear at almost any age, although it can be especially prevalent among the elderly and teenagers. Certain personality types are more prone to depression. Those who are pessimistic, easily stressed and have low self-esteem may be more likely to become depressed.

### Situational Depression

Situational depression is usually triggered by a stressful event, such as a marital breakup or serious illness. Unlike major depression, situational depression typically goes away after a few months and may not require treatment. However, if the symptoms persist, you should seek professional assistance.

Symptoms of situational depression include:

- Sadness
- Low self-esteem
- Frequent worrying and anxiety
- Poor sleep habits
- Change in eating habits
- Irritability.

### Major Depression

Major depression is a psychiatric illness affecting nearly one in 10 people at any time. The symptoms are more severe than the normal sadness associated with a stressful life event. Major depression can affect your ability to function, pursue and maintain relationships, and engage in work and pleasurable activities.

Symptoms of major depression include:

- Agitation and irritability
- Lack of interest in enjoyable activities
- Lack of energy and fatigue

- Lack of appetite and weight loss, or weight gain
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Indifference to environmental changes (e.g. weather, work changes)
- Social isolation
- Digestive disorders
- Suicidal thoughts.

Depression in a less serious form is called dysthymia.

## Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder, or manic depression, is marked by mood swings between the opposite extremes of depression and mania. Episodes of either may alternate rapidly every few days or weeks. While depressed, the individual may experience the typical symptoms of major depression. While manic, the individual may experience the following symptoms:

- Euphoria
- Inappropriate social behaviour
- Distorted judgment
- High energy levels
- Rapid, constant talking
- Inability to sleep
- Increased sexual desire.

## Treatment Options

Depression is an illness that can respond to treatment. Three effective methods of treating depression include:

- Antidepressant medications: These can treat the symptoms of depression successfully for about two out of three people. Usually, these medications take four to six weeks before substantial improvement is noticed. Talk to your GP about medication options and potential side effects, which may include symptoms such as drowsiness, dry mouth, headaches, nausea, insomnia, sexual dysfunction and constipation.
- Psychotherapy: Talking to a therapist or a psychiatrist about your problems can be effective. Through therapy, you may be able to identify unresolved problems, recognise thought patterns, improve coping skills, concentrate on improving your interpersonal relationships and understand how to prevent the depression from recurring.
- A combination of both antidepressant medications and therapy: Talk therapy and medication together have the most impressive track record in treating depression.

If you've been feeling down for an extended period, talk to your GP. You may have a depressive illness that could worsen the longer you delay treatment. If you're feeling depressed, emotionally overwhelmed or suicidal, talk to your GP, a professional counsellor or therapist.

## Ways to Beat the Blues

Here are several tips to help you fight depression:

- Seek professional support: Talk to your GP, therapist or professional counsellor.
- Manage your stress: Learn effective ways to reduce your stress and anxiety, which may minimise your feelings of depression.

- Exercise and eat right: A nutritionally balanced diet and regular fitness activities can improve your mood and boost your self-esteem. Talk to your GP about a diet and exercise programme that's right for you.
- Be more social: Stay in touch with friends and family. Get out more often, and participate in enjoyable activities such as attending social gatherings, seeing movies, and having lunch or dinner with friends.
- Educate yourself: Learn all you can about depression, support groups in your area and managing your feelings.

## Resources

- Mind: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- NHS Direct: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)
- Action on Depression: [www.actionondepression.org](http://www.actionondepression.org)
- Bipolar Scotland: [www.bipolarscotland.org.uk](http://www.bipolarscotland.org.uk)
- Aware Defeat Depression - Northern Ireland: [www.aware-ni.org](http://www.aware-ni.org)
- Mental Health Ireland: [www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)
- C.A.L.L. Mental Health Helpline for Wales: <http://callhelpline.org.uk>

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