



# DEPRESSION

## **What is depression?**

Most people feel low, “down in the dumps” and lacking in energy at times. However, if this feeling lasts for most of the day for more than two weeks, this could be depression. When this happens, it can be difficult to do things you used to manage.

### **How you might feel if you are depressed:**

- sad, guilty, numb, in despair
- tearful
- unable to cry
- irritable
- lonely
- unmotivated

### **What you might notice happening in your body:**

- it might be hard to concentrate
- you might be forgetful
- your appetite might increase or decrease
- you might find it hard to get enough sleep
- you might find that you are sleeping much more than usual
- you might find that you do not have much energy

## **What you might think:**

- you might have critical thoughts about yourself. (For example, “I am a waste of space”)
- you might make negative thoughts about the future. (For example, “Things are never going to get better”)
- you might think things are hopeless
- you might have suicidal thoughts or thoughts about harming yourself

## **How you might act:**

- you might spend a lot of time by yourself
- you might avoid doing things that you need to do or previously enjoyed doing
- you might spend a lot of time in bed
- you might find it difficult to do quite simple things

If a lot of these seem familiar, it may be that you have symptoms of depression or low mood. Depression is very common.

It is important to know that people will react to depression in different ways. Not everyone with depression will suffer all of these symptoms.

It is normal to feel these symptoms after distressing events. This could be the loss of someone close to you or a relationship breakdown. When events like these take place, it is helpful to talk over how you are feeling with a person you trust, or you may prefer to express your feelings in writing or with the use of images. If you are finding it difficult to cope, you should also visit your GP.

## Why do people become depressed?

There is no single reason why people become depressed. It can be due to many reasons. These are different for each person.

**Biological reasons** may play a part. You may be more likely to suffer if a family member has had depression. This does not mean that you *will* develop it. It means you may be more *vulnerable* to depression.

**Our early experiences** can have an affect on the chances of us developing depression. You may become depressed if you have had difficult experiences in your early life.

Depression can also be caused by some **brain chemicals** being less active than they should be. This can affect sleep, appetite, sexual drive and mood.

**Difficult life events** can make people stressed, and this can lead to depression.

Stressful situations can be:

- unemployment
- illness
- relationship breakdowns
- financial difficulties

Depression can develop out of the blue with no reason as to why you are feeling depressed. There are things you can do to improve how you are feeling despite what has caused the depression.

# The vicious cycle of depression

Our thoughts, bodily symptoms, mood and behaviour all affect one another. They can work together to become a **vicious cycle**.

Here is an example of a vicious cycle below.

## The vicious cycle of depression

### Outside world

- frustrating events/situations
- practical problems, eg financial difficulties
- stress
- loss
- change in circumstances

Lead to...

### Depressed thoughts

“Things are never going to get better.”  
“I am useless.”  
“I shouldn’t be feeling this way.”

### Behaviour

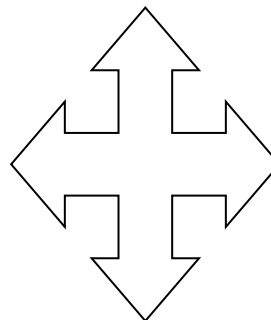
Avoid people  
Stop doing things you enjoy  
Find it hard to do simple things  
Spend long periods in bed

### Mood

Sad, upset  
Numb  
Guilty  
Lonely

### Bodily symptoms

Feeling tired  
Restlessness  
Difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep



# Breaking the vicious cycle – things to do to make you feel better

The good news is that there are lots of things that you can do to break the vicious cycle.

## 1. Physical Exercise

When you exercise, your body produces natural anti-depressants, so exercise can be a helpful way to improve your mood. If you are depressed, you may experience reduced energy levels and lower motivation, but physical exercise can actually help you to feel *less* tired.

Try to do 20 minutes of exercise at least three times a week. You could gradually build up the intensity or length of time that you exercise for. Spend some time thinking about what type of exercise you might enjoy doing. It could be something you have enjoyed in the past or something you have always wanted to try.

Make a note of some types of physical activity that you think you might enjoy:

.....  
.....  
.....

## 2. Get the balance right

You might find it difficult to carry out some of your everyday tasks, spend time with others and do things you enjoy when you are depressed. There is lots of evidence to suggest that doing activities that give you a sense of *achievement*, *closeness to others* and *pleasure* can help you to feel better.

Here are some examples of these types of activities:

**Achievement:**

- Finishing a pile of ironing
- Completing a puzzle or jigsaw
- Sorting through bills and letters you have been putting off

**Pleasure:**

- Having a nice hot bath
- Going to the cinema
- Listening to your favourite music

**Closeness to others:**

- Calling a friend for a chat
- Visiting relatives
- Going to a social group or club

**What things could you plan to do?**

Achievement	Pleasure	Closeness to others

**3. Set achievable goals**

Because depression can sometimes cause low motivation, reduced energy levels and poor concentration, some tasks that you used to be able to manage, can feel overwhelming.

To help you achieve these, it can be helpful to break big tasks into smaller, more manageable steps. So rather than telling yourself to do all of the housework, try to break it down into smaller steps, for instance, clean the kitchen worktops, put a load of washing on, tidy the bedroom, etc.

- try to make a list of things that you would like to do or that you have been avoiding
- choose the easiest or most important one
- write a series of steps to tackle the situation, starting with the easiest and ending with the hardest
- work your way through the steps, if one is too hard; try going back one step or breaking the step down
- if you have a set-back, don't be put off. Try again soon or make the step a bit easier
- congratulate and reward yourself when you have done well

By breaking tasks down, they are more manageable, you are more likely to achieve them and then feel good for having done so.

A good rule to follow is to do what you have planned despite how you feel. Afterwards, go and ask yourself “how do I feel? Do I feel better, worse or the same as before?”

If the answer is worse, then you could try something else that you have put on your list.

#### **4. Talk to others**

Telling someone who you trust how you are feeling can be really helpful, or you may prefer to express your feelings in writing or with the use of images. You might be surprised to find out that others have felt in a similar way before and they may be able to provide advice and support.



It can be helpful just to have someone listen to how you are feeling and help you think things through. You might find it helpful to give them this booklet to read to help them understand how you might be feeling.

## **5. Take care of yourself**

It may be tempting to drink alcohol, misuse medication or take illegal drugs to help you cope and provide some short-term relief, but in the long term this can result in psychological and health problems.

Diet can have an effect on mood. Foods high in sugar and fat can provide a short burst of energy but can cause irritability and mood swings.

Caffeine can give us a boost when we are feeling tired, but the effects can last for 6 hours and so try to avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening. Caffeine in excess can also cause some feelings of anxiety and agitation.

## **6. Challenging negative thinking**

When we are depressed, we often have negative thoughts about:

### **Ourselves:**

*“I can’t cope with this.”*

*“I am useless; I shouldn’t be feeling this way.”*

### **About others:**

*“No-one likes me.”*

*“Everyone copes so much better than me.”*

### **The world:**

*“Life is so unfair.”*

*“The world is a cruel place.”*

**And the future:**

*“Things are just going to get worse and worse.”*

*“I will fail at that, there is no point in trying.”*

Our thoughts are **opinions**, they are not **facts**. Sometimes they can be inaccurate and unhelpful, particularly when we are depressed and feeling low.

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Thought</b>	<b>Balanced perspective</b>
Argument with a family member.	“I am such a horrible person, why can’t I just get along with my family?”	“I have argued with my brother before and we always make up. Arguments in families happen all the time.”
An old friend walks past me in the street and doesn’t wave.	“I bet she didn’t say hello because she doesn’t like me. She probably thinks I am boring and stupid.”	“She looked like she was busy thinking about something and probably didn’t see me. I have no reason to believe that she doesn’t like me, we always got on quite well.”

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Thought</b>	<b>Balanced perspective</b>

## **What treatments are there for depression?**

The first step for depression is normally visiting your GP. Your GP may recommend for you to take anti-depressant medication, or to receive a psychological therapy or both of these.

### **Further Information**

[www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)

[Depression self-help guide | NHS inform](#)  
[Self-harm | NHS inform](#)

# NOTES

Revised Sept 2024  
Review Sept 2026  
V1 30/9/24