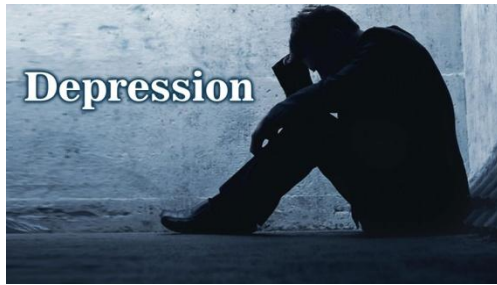


Depression



Most people have felt sad or depressed at times. Feeling depressed can be a normal reaction to loss, life's struggles, or an injured self-esteem.

But when feelings of intense sadness -- including feeling *helpless, hopeless, and worthless*-- last for many days to weeks and keep you from functioning normally, your depression may be something more than sadness. It may very well be clinical depression -- a treatable medical condition.

Depression is a *real* illness that impacts the brain. Anyone suffering from depression will tell you, it's not imaginary or "all in your head." Depression is more than just feeling "down." It is a serious illness caused by changes in brain chemistry. Research tells us that other factors contribute to the onset of depression, including genetics, changes in hormone levels, certain medical conditions, stress, grief or difficult life circumstances. Any of these factors alone or in combination can precipitate changes in brain chemistry that lead to depression's many symptoms.

How Do I Know If I Have Depression?

What are the symptoms of depression?

Am I depressed?

The following are all symptoms of depression, and if you tick off five or more of any of them you are probably depressed.

My feelings

- I am low-spirited for much of the time, every day
- I feel restless and agitated I get tearful easily
- I feel numb, empty and full of despair
- I feel isolated and unable to relate to other people

- I am unusually irritable or impatient
- I find no pleasure in life or things
- I usually enjoy
- I feel helpless
- I have lost interest in sex I am experiencing a sense of unreality

My thoughts

- I am having difficulty remembering things
- I find it hard to concentrate or make decisions
- I blame myself a lot and feel guilty about things
- I have no self-confidence or self-esteem
- I am having a lot of negative thoughts The future seems bleak What's the point?
- I have been thinking about suicide

My behavior

- I'm not doing activities I usually enjoy
- I am avoiding social events I usually enjoy
- I have cut myself off from others and can't ask for help
- I am self-harming
- I find it difficult to speak

My physical symptoms

- I have difficulty sleeping
- I am sleeping much more than usual
- I feel tired and have no energy
- I have lost my appetite, and am losing weight
- I am eating a lot more than usual and putting on weight
- I have physical aches and pains with no obvious physical cause
- I am moving very slowly
- I am using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual

As per above Point shows, depression presents itself in many different ways. You may not realise what's going on, because sometimes your problems seem to be physical, rather than mental or emotional. There are also some other mental health problems often linked to depression.

10 Ways Depression Will Change You

Energy Loss: It's very common to feel you've done a full day of heavy labor when in fact the day hasn't even begun. Energy loss and fatigue are common symptoms of depression.

Enjoyment bypass: For some reason things don't smell or taste as good as they once used to. Your senses lose their edge and the pleasures once enjoyed diminish.

Guilt: The most human of errors are judged disproportionately. Minor mistakes or indiscretions, even distant memories, may be thought of with shame or guilt.

Tears or Torpor: Some people with depression feel great despondency and sadness and cry a great deal. Others go emotionally flat. They feel flat and hollow inside as though their emotions have been drained.

Aches and Pains: There is often an increase in physical symptoms when people become depressed. They may complain of back pain, headaches or stomach upsets or just a vague sense of feeling generally unwell.

Hopelessness: When people are depressed the world and their future in it seems an altogether bleak prospect. There's often a sense that no matter what you say or do nothing will ever change except perhaps for the worse.

Anxiety: When depression strikes it is invariably accompanied by worry and anxiety and, not uncommonly, one or more stressful experiences is the culprit. The way we respond and adapt to stressful situations can have an important bearing on our vulnerability to depression.

Moodiness: Irritability and general moodiness are common ingredients in the depression mix. You may find yourself becoming impatient, tetchy, argumentative and intolerant.

Sensitivity: People with depression are on high alert for anything that fuels their vulnerabilities. Implied or direct criticism or rejection aren't received well and reinforce a state of worthlessness and hopelessness.

What can I do to help myself?

An important thing to accept is that there are usually no instant solutions to problems in life. Solving problems involves time, energy and work. When you are feeling depressed, you may not be feeling energetic or motivated to work. But if you are able to take an active part in your treatment, it should help your situation.

Break the cycle of negativity

If you are starting to feel depressed it can be very easy to get into a cycle of automatic negative thoughts that then become difficult for you to challenge: you get depressed and then you get more depressed about being depressed. Being in a state of depression can then become a bigger problem than the actual difficulties that caused it in the first place.

You need to make a conscious effort to break the hold that the depression has on you. Deciding to do something to help yourself is the most important step you can take.

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

Keep active

Research and individual personal experience show that regular exercise can be very effective in lifting your mood and increasing your energy levels, and it is also likely to improve your appetite and sleep. Physical activity stimulates chemicals in the brain called endorphins, which can help you to feel better.

Although you may not feel like it to start with, it's very therapeutic to take part in physical activities, for 20 minutes a day. It does not have to be very strenuous or sporty to be effective. Walking at a reasonable speed and taking notice of what is around you is a good start. Walking in a green environment, such as the park or the countryside, is especially helpful for you

You may also enjoy swimming, running, or joining in competitive or team sports, which can also give you the opportunity for social contact with people who share your interests. (See Mind tips for better mental health: physical activity.)

“ It's so important to keep as busy as your depression allows you to. It's easy to dismiss engaging in hobbies and activities, saying that they won't help and giving up... even people who don't have depression become low if they are bored or under-stimulated for long periods. Learning to become active again played an essential part in my recovery and helps me to stay well.”

Connect with other people

Although you may not feel like it, keeping in touch with people can help you feel a bit more grounded and sometimes get things more in perspective. Try a short phone call to a close friend or relative, or if you can't manage it, just an email or text message.

When you feel ready, you may find it helpful to do something to help other people, as this may help overcome any feelings of isolation you have, take your mind off your own problems and make you feel better about yourself

It can also be a great relief to meet and share experiences with other people who are going through the same thing you are. Self-help groups can show you how other people have coped and provide mutual support, as well as breaking down feelings of isolation. They are often led

by people who have overcome depression themselves. For help in finding local self-help groups, talk to your local Mind (see 'Mind in your area' on the Mind website), call the Mind Infoline, or ask your GP.

Care for yourself

You need to 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. e.g. a long bath, a day out with a friend.
- Pay attention to your personal appearance.
- Set yourself goals that you can achieve and that will give you a sense of satisfaction.
- If you find it hard to remember things, you may want to write them down on sticky notes, in a diary or set reminders on your mobile phone.
- Look after yourself by eating healthily, as much as possible. Oily fish, in particular, may help reduce depression.
- Be cautious with tobacco, alcohol or other drugs, which make depression worse, and a lot of caffeine which may make you a bit jittery.

“Would I change what happened to me? Definitely not. It made me who I am, its part of me and it’s made me a better person... I started enjoying life again. I could look to the future and want to live it... Believe me, it can get better. “

Depression self-help tips

Depression self-help tip 1: Stay connected

When you're depressed, the tendency is to withdraw and isolate. Even reaching out to close family members and friends can be tough. Compound that with the feelings of shame and the guilt you may feel at neglecting your relationships.

But social support is absolutely essential to depression recovery. Staying connected to other people and the outside world will make a world of difference in your mood and outlook. And if you don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, it's never too late to build new friendships and improve your support network.

- **Reaching out is not a sign of weakness-** and it won't mean you're a burden to others. The truth is that most people are flattered if you trust them enough to confide in them. Your loved ones care about you and want to help.

- **Look for support from people who make you feel safe and cared for.** The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to fix you; he or she just needs to be a good listener—someone who'll listen attentively and compassionately without being distracted or judging you.
- **Make face-time a priority.** Phone calls, social media, and texting are great ways to stay in touch, but they don't replace good old-fashioned in-person quality time. The simple act of talking to someone face to face about how you feel can play a big role in lifting the fog of depression and keeping it away.
- **Try to keep up with social activities even if you don't feel like it.** Often when you're depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell, but being around other people will make you feel less depressed.
- **Find ways to support others.** It's nice to receive support, but research shows you get an even bigger mood boost from providing support yourself. So find ways—both big and small—to help others: volunteer, be a listening ear for a friend, do something nice for somebody.
- **Care for a pet.** While nothing can replace the human connection, pets can bring joy and companionship into your life and help you feel less isolated. Caring for a pet can also get you outside of yourself and give you a sense of being needed—both powerful antidotes to depression.

10 Ways for reaching out and staying connected

1. Talk to one person about your feelings
2. Help someone else by volunteering
3. Have lunch or coffee with a friend
4. Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly
5. Accompany someone to the movies, a concert, or a small get-together
6. Call or email an old friend
7. Go for a walk with a workout buddy
8. Schedule a weekly dinner date
9. Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club
10. Confide in a clergy member, teacher, or sports coach

Depression self-help tip 2: Get moving

When you're depressed, just getting out of bed can seem like a daunting task, let alone working out! But exercise is a powerful depression fighter—and one of the most important tools in your recovery arsenal. Research shows that regular exercise can be as effective as medication for relieving depression symptoms. It also helps prevent relapse once you're well.

To get the most benefit, aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise per day. This doesn't have to be all at once—and it's okay to start small. A 10-minute walk can improve your mood for two hours.

Exercise is something you can do right now to boost your mood

- **Your fatigue will improve if you stick with it.** Starting to exercise can be difficult when you're depressed and exhausted. But research shows that your energy levels will improve if you keep with it. You will be less fatigued, not more, once it's part of your routine.
- **Find exercises that are continuous and rhythmic.** The most benefits for depression come from rhythmic exercise—such as walking, weight training, swimming, martial arts, or dancing—where you move both your arms and legs.
- **Add a mindfulness element,** especially if your depression is rooted in unresolved trauma or fed by obsessive, negative thoughts. Focus on how your body feels as you move—such as the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, or the feeling of the wind on your skin, or the rhythm of your breathing.

Depression self-help tip 3: Do things that make you feel good

In order to overcome depression, you have to do things that relax and energize you. This includes following a healthy lifestyle, learning how to better manage stress, setting limits on what you're able to do, and scheduling fun activities into your day.

Do things you enjoy (or used to)



While you can't force yourself to have fun or experience pleasure, you can push yourself to do things, even when you don't feel like it. You might be surprised at how much better you feel once you're out in the world. Even if your depression doesn't lift immediately, you'll gradually feel more upbeat and energetic as you make time for fun activities.

- Pick up a former hobby or a sport you used to like.
- Express yourself creatively through music, art, or writing.
- Go out with friends.
- Take a day trip to a museum, the mountains, or the ballpark.

Support your health

- **Aim for eight hours of sleep.** Depression typically involves sleep problems; whether you're sleeping too little or too much, your mood suffers. Get on a better sleep schedule by learning healthy sleep habits.
- **Expose yourself to a little sunlight every day.** Lack of sunlight can make depression worse. Take a short walk outdoors, have your coffee outside, enjoy an *al fresco* meal, people-watch on a park bench, or sit out in the garden. Aim for at least 15 minutes of sunlight a day to boost your mood. If you live somewhere with little winter sunshine, try using a light therapy box.
- **Practice relaxation techniques.** A daily relaxation practice can help relieve symptoms of depression, reduce stress, and boost feelings of joy and well-being. Try yoga, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation.

Depression self-help tip 4: Eat a healthy, mood-boosting diet



What you eat has a direct impact on the way you feel. Reduce your intake of foods that can adversely affect your brain and mood, such as caffeine, alcohol, trans fats, and foods with high levels of chemical preservatives or hormones (such as certain meats).

- **Don't skip meals.** Going too long between meals can make you feel irritable and tired, so aim to eat something at least every three to four hours.
- **Minimize sugar and refined carbs.** You may crave sugary snacks, baked goods, or comfort foods such as pasta or French fries, but these “feel-good” foods quickly lead to a crash in mood and energy. Aim to cut out as much of these foods as possible.
- **Boost your B vitamins.** Deficiencies in B vitamins such as folic acid and B-12 can trigger depression. To get more, take a B-complex vitamin supplement or eat more citrus fruit, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs.
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Depression self-help tip 5: Challenge negative thinking

Do you feel like you're powerless or weak? That bad things happen and there's not much you can do about it? That your situation is hopeless? Depression puts a negative spin on everything, including the way you see yourself and your expectations for the future.

When these types of thoughts overwhelm you, it's important to remind yourself that this is the depression talking. These irrational, pessimistic attitudes—known as *cognitive distortions*—aren't realistic. When you really examine them they don't hold up. But even so, they can be tough to give up. Just telling yourself to “think positive” won't cut it. Often, they're part of a lifelong pattern of thinking that's become so automatic you're not even completely aware of it.

Negative, unrealistic ways of thinking that fuel depression

All-or-nothing thinking – Looking at things in black-or-white categories, with no middle ground (“If I fall short of perfection, I'm a total failure.”)

Overgeneralization – Generalizing from a single negative experience, expecting it to hold true forever (“I can't do anything right.”)

The mental filter – Ignoring positive events and focusing on the negative. Noticing the one thing that went wrong, rather than all the things that went right.

Diminishing the positive – Coming up with reasons why positive events don't count (“She said she had a good time on our date, but I think she was just being nice.”)

Jumping to conclusions – Making negative interpretations without actual evidence. You act like a mind reader (“He must think I'm pathetic”) or a fortune teller (“I'll be stuck in this dead end job forever.”)

Emotional reasoning – Believing that the way you feel reflects reality (“I feel like such a loser. I really am no good!”)

'Shoulds' and 'should-nots' – Holding yourself to a strict list of what you should and shouldn't do, and beating yourself up if you don't live up to your rules.

Labeling – Labeling yourself based on mistakes and perceived shortcomings (“I'm a failure; an idiot; a loser.”)

Put your thoughts on the witness stand

Once you identify the destructive thoughts patterns that you default to, you can start to challenge them with questions such as:

- “What's the evidence that this thought is true? Not true?”
- “What would I tell a friend who had this thought?”
- “Is there another way of looking at the situation or an alternate explanation?”

- “How might I look at this situation if I didn’t have depression?”

As you cross-examine your negative thoughts, you may be surprised at how quickly they crumble. In the process, you’ll develop a more balanced perspective.