



The Wellness Consultancy

Understanding low mood and depression

Everyone can feel low and unhappy – sadness is a natural emotional reaction to difficult things that happen in life. Low mood will tend to improve after a short time. Making some small changes in our lives such as resolving a difficult situation or talking about problems and basic self-care like getting more sleep, can all improve our mood.

A low mood that doesn't go away is often called depression. Many difficult events and experiences can cause depression: relationship and family problems, bullying, bereavement, illness and chronic pain being just a few. Often people close to us see depression before we do.

Signs and symptoms of depression

Below are symptoms that people who identify as having depression commonly talk about:

- Not wanting to do things that we previously enjoyed
- Not wanting to meet up with friends or avoiding situations
- Sleeping more or less than normal
- Eating more or less than normal
- Feeling irritable, upset, miserable or lonely
- Being self-critical
- Feeling hopeless
- Maybe wanting to self-harm or not wanting to live
- Feeling tired and not having any energy
- No sex drive
- Increasing alcohol or taking substances, overtaking prescription medication/ painkillers, over-spending in attempt to make us feel better
- Feeling demotivated and having no 'get up and go' to achieve things



Different types of depression

Let's explore the labels of depression that GPs and mental health professionals use.

- Clinical depression means that a doctor has given you a diagnosis of depression. A depressive episode – is the formal nature doctors give depression when they make a diagnosis and they may say you are going through a mild, moderate or severe episode.
- Recurrent depressive disorder is normally when you've had more than 2 depressive episodes that have lasted some time. Again this can be labelled as mild, moderate or severe.
- Reactive depression – if you and your doctor believe that this was triggered by difficult events in your life such as divorce, bereavement or a major stressful event, this can be called reactive. Basically it means the episode is a response to significant life event.

- Dysthymia – this is what is referred to when someone experiences mild depression that lasts for more than 2 years. This can also be called persistent depressive disorder or chronic depression.
- Cyclothymia – is when we experience persistent and unstable moods. You may have episodes of depression but also periods of elation, but these episodes may not be severe or last long enough to be diagnosed as bi-polar disorder.
- Bi-polar/manic depression – is a different illness to depression but people with bi-polar experience periods of depression, as well as periods of extreme highs.
- Psychotic depression – this is where we experience a severe episode and can have hallucinations or delusional thoughts. These symptoms are called psychosis. A hallucination can be that we see, hear, smell, taste or feel things that aren't real. This can be very frightening for the individual and people around them. A delusion means that your view of reality is distorted.
- Pre and post-natal depression – peri-natal depression is experienced during pregnancy; post-depression after becoming a parent and can be felt by both women and men. This can be linked to many things such as intense hormonal changes, illness during and after pregnancy, a traumatic birth and the intense stress of becoming a parent.
- Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) – this is when people experience depression during particular seasons and in certain types of weather. Individuals find that their mood and energy levels drops when it gets colder or even warmer, and notice changes in sleeping and eating patterns.

What can help depression

Take a look at this useful NHS guide on how to help improve depression. One of the most important ways to support ourselves is to stay connected – that might be to people, pets, activities, nature. This might feel like the most difficult step but it is the one that can make the most positive difference.

[Low mood - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/health-a-z/low-mood/)

1. Keep a daily plan and stick to it – no matter how you feel it's important to get up and focus on one or two things you want to achieve that day. It may be something simple like having a shower, cooking yourself a hot meal, watching a TV programme, ringing your GP to order medication. Write down what you want to do the day before and put this somewhere you can see – on the fridge door, by the kettle.
2. Challenge those negative thoughts – notice constant thoughts that enter your mind that are critical in tone and unhelpful. Just because we think something doesn't mean it's true. How many of us have thought something would

happen and it never did? Our mind can be cruel and at times our worst enemy. You can let negative thoughts go by accepting them for what they are – just a thought. Let them go like a passing cloud. Consciously move your focus onto something else – bring up a happy memory from the past, focus on a healthy distraction, get up and do something physical. This often isn't easy to do but neither is sitting in a sea of sadness and negative thinking. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can help if we are stuck in a cycle of negative thinking and can help us to change our belief system and how we behave in response to that.

3. Focusing on eating well, doing some physical movement (even if you can't exercise formally), basic self care like showering, putting on clean clothes and keeping your environment tidy. These basic things are the building blocks of recovery so if don't feel you can do anything else in a day try to prioritise these activities. Build in one positive activity that you have found helps your mood stay positive. This may not come naturally right now and you may think 'what's the point'. That's a common negative thought when we are depressed to question the value of living and functioning. Remember a time when you knew what the point was. Even if your life has fundamentally changed from what it was, your life has value. Perhaps this episode of depression is causing you to reflect on that purpose now is. It's not uncommon for people who are going through life transitions to feel lost and lose a sense of purpose.

One of the most important ways to help with depression is to have a compassionate attitude. Compassion, having understanding, being kind to *ourself* can be a new concept. This is something we are often taught to give others, not apply to us. Research has shown that self-compassion is a major help in recovering from depression because it knocks self-criticism on the head. Two of the leaders in the field of Compassionate Focused Therapy (CFT) are Professor Paul Gilbert and Dr Kirsten Neff.

If you want to learn more about compassion and how it helps depression take a look at these resources:

[Microsoft Word - Clinical patient handout April 30 v2.doc \(getselfhelp.co.uk\)](#)

<https://compassionatemind.co.uk/>

[Self-Compassion](#)

Next steps

If you notice yourself struggling with depressive symptoms or have had reliable feedback from others close to you about how you have changed, take the next step. Talk and acknowledge it. You may want to access professional help such as talking to your GP or accessing some mental health support. Perhaps you'd like to think about proactive ways to make healthy life changes. Some people find therapy or medication helpful if symptoms have continued for a while. Depression can also be

a natural reaction to a difficult time in our lives so it doesn't always need medicalising or 'labelling'. What it does need though is kindness, help and support.

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Take a look at our website www.wellnessconsultancy.org which has lots of useful self-help information.