

Depression

Depression is very common:

It's estimated that between 4-10% of people in England will experience depression in their lifetime.

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects everyday life. In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. It will not stop someone from leading their normal life but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening, leaving people feeling suicidal or simply give up the will to live.

When does low mood become depression?

Everyone has times when their mood is low, and they are left feeling sad or miserable about life. Usually these feelings pass in due course. But if the feelings are interfering with life and don't go away after a couple of weeks, or if they come back over and over again for a few days at a time, it could be a sign that someone is experiencing depression.

Are there different types of depression?

When given a diagnosis of depression, they might be told that they have mild, moderate or severe depression. This describes what sort of impact your symptoms are having and what sort of treatment they're likely to be offered.

There are also some specific types of depression:

- **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)** – depression that usually (but not always) occurs in the winter.
- **Dysthymia** – continuous mild depression that lasts for two years or more. Also called persistent depressive disorder or chronic depression.
- **Prenatal depression** – sometimes also called antenatal depression, it occurs during pregnancy.
- **Postnatal depression (PND)** – occurs in the weeks and months after becoming a parent. Postnatal depression is only diagnosed in women but it can affect men, too.

Diagnosis:

Doctors will diagnose a clinical depression when at least 5 of the following symptoms are present for at least 2 weeks:

- Depressed mood most of the day, every day, as indicated by the person or by others.
- Loss of interest or pleasure in all or almost all activities most of the day, nearly every day

- Significant weight loss or weight gain, or decrease/ increase in appetite
- Insomnia
- Psychomotor agitation or retardation
- Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt nearly every day
- Poor concentration or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation with/without plan.

What it's like to have depression:

Physical Sensations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty sleeping or sleeping more than usual • feeling tired, lacking in energy or moving slower than usual • changes in appetite; increased or reduced appetite • physical aches and pains without any obvious cause • loss of libido
Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low-spirited for much of the time, every day • restless and agitated becoming irritable or tearful easily • numb and empty • isolated and unable to relate to other people • finding little or no pleasure in life or things usually enjoyed • a sense of unreality • low self-confidence and self-esteem • hopeless and despairing • suicidal
Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • avoiding social events and activities that are usually enjoyed • self-harming or suicidal behaviour • finding it difficult to speak or think clearly • difficulty in remembering or concentrating on things • using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual

“It starts as sadness then I feel myself shutting down, becoming less capable of coping. Eventually, I just feel numb and empty”.

Causes:

There are several ideas about what causes depression. It can vary a lot between different people, and for some people a combination of different factors may cause their depression. Some find that they become depressed without any obvious reason. Some of the causes identified are:

- childhood experiences
- life events
- other mental health problems
- physical health problems
- genetic inheritance
- medication, drugs and alcohol
- sleep, diet and exercise

Treatment:

The sort of treatment people are offered for depression will depend on how much their symptoms are affecting them and their personal preference for what sort of treatment they find helpful.

The main treatments for depression are:

- talking treatments
- medication (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), tricyclics and tricyclic-related drugs, monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), other antidepressants)

For family and friends:

The support of friends and family can play a very important role in someone recovering from depression. Here are some suggestions that can be helpful.

Support to get help. You can't force anyone to get help if they don't want it, so it's important to reassure that it's OK to ask for help, and that there is help out there.

Be open about depression. Lots of people can find it hard to open up and speak about how they're feeling. Try to be open about depression and difficult emotions, so others know that it's OK to talk about what they're experiencing.

“The best things that friends and family can do is simply listen. They often don't need to say anything, just being willing to listen to your problems makes you feel less alone and isolated”.

Keep in touch. It may be hard for people to have the energy to keep up contact, so try to keep in touch. Even just a text message or email to let them know that you're thinking of them can make a big difference to how someone feels.

Don't be critical. It can be hard to understand depression if you haven't experienced it yourself. Someone experiencing depression can't just 'snap out of it'. Try not to blame them or put too much pressure on them to get better straight away – they are probably being very critical and harsh towards themselves already.

Keep a balance. If someone is struggling, you might feel like you should take care of everything for them. While it might be useful to offer to help them do things, like keep on top of the housework or cook healthy meals, it's also important to encourage them to do things for themselves. Everyone will need different support, so talk to your friend or family member about what they might find useful to have your help with, and identify things they can try to do themselves.

Practice self-care. Supporting someone else can put a strain on wellbeing, looking after our own mental health is important too.

How this may apply in a work setting:

- Decreased productivity
- Morale problems
- Lack of co-operation
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Absenteeism
- Complaints about being tired and lacking in energy
- Changes in appearance; looking sad, slow in moving and speech, lack of attention of personal appearance
- Changes in attitude and thinking; 'I'm a failure', 'I've let everyone down', 'nothing good ever happens', 'I'm worthless'.