

# Depression — more than just “the blues”



Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses. Globally, around 5% of adults suffer from depression<sup>1</sup> and, in England, it's estimated that around one person in six will experience depression of some kind in their lifetime, with one in 20 experiencing clinical depression.<sup>2</sup>

Depression can affect every aspect of your life — emotions, physical health and relationships — and can seriously affect your quality of life. Your performance at work may also suffer through reduced productivity and absence.

Having a mental health problem such as depression increases the chances of unemployment. The unemployment rate for people with a common mental health condition is double that of the general population.<sup>3</sup>

## What is depression?

Depression is a common and serious mental health problem. It can range from being in low spirits, where everything feels harder to do and less worthwhile, to severe depression, which can be very debilitating, affecting every aspect of your life and potentially leading to suicidal feelings. There are many signs and symptoms of depression and one person's experience will be very different to another's. To help recognise when you, or someone else is experiencing depression, mental health charity Mind outlines some of the common signs: <sup>4</sup>

How you might feel	How you might behave
Down, upset or tearful	• Avoiding social events and activities you usually enjoy
Restless, agitated or irritable	• Difficulty speaking, thinking clearly or making decisions
Guilty, worthless and down on yourself	• Losing interest in sex
Empty and numb	• Difficulty remembering or concentrating on things
Isolated and unable to relate to other people	• Using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual
Finding no pleasure in life or things you usually enjoy	• Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much
A sense of unreality	• Feeling tired all the time
No self-confidence or self-esteem	• No appetite and losing weight, or eating too much and gaining weight
Hopeless and despairing	• Physical aches and pains with no obvious physical cause
Suicidal	• Moving very slowly, or being restless and agitated

## Diagnosing depression

- If you think you could be experiencing depression, it is important that you speak to your GP or a mental health professional for a proper diagnosis. In addition to reviewing your medical history, your doctor will ask about your symptoms.
- You are likely to receive a diagnosis of depression if you experience at least five of the following symptoms over a two-week period, with the first two symptoms (marked in bold) the most significant signs.

### Self-assessment: Are you experiencing symptoms of depression<sup>5</sup>

Tick any of the symptoms that you have had nearly every day during the same two-week period. Give the specific frequency and timeframe for each symptom that you mark.

	Symptoms of depression	Frequency/Timeframe of symptoms
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Depressed or irritable mood most of the day, nearly every day</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Loss of interest or pleasure</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Changes in weight or appetite	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sleep problems	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Agitation	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tiredness and loss of energy	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Feeling guilty or worthless	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Difficulty in concentrating or making decisions	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Thoughts of death or suicide	



### What can you do?

At the earliest signs of depression, take steps to prevent negative feelings. If symptoms persist or worsen, speak to your GP or call your employee assistance programme.

## Coping with mild to moderate depression

If you have mild to moderate depression, there are actions you can take that can help you cope and reduce your risk of becoming more seriously depressed.

The Mental Health Foundation has the following suggestions:

- **Social support** – being able to turn to friends and family for support can make a big difference to how you feel.
- **Activity and exercise** – exercise releases a chemical in the brain that boosts your mood. It also tends to be sociable, which can also help.
- **Diet** – a healthy diet can reduce the risk of depression. It's particularly good to avoid over-reliance on alcohol and tobacco, as these will make you feel worse in the longer-term.
- **Complementary therapies** – relaxation techniques, aromatherapy, massage and acupuncture can all help some people cope with depression.
- **Taking control** – setting small, manageable goals can give a sense of achievement and help you overcome some of the feelings associated with depression.

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