

A BRIEF GUIDE TO
**UNDERSTANDING
DEPRESSION**



What is depression?

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time, and affects your everyday life.

In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. It doesn't stop you leading a normal life but makes everything harder to do. At its most severe, depression can be life-threatening because it can make you feel suicidal. Please visit the SAMH website if you would like more information about suicide prevention.

We all have times when our mood is low, but if the feelings are interfering with your life, don't go away after a couple of weeks, or come back over and over again for a few days at a time, it could be a sign that you're experiencing depression.

How you might feel:

- Down or tearful
- Empty and numb
- Isolated and unable to relate to other people
- Hopeless, despairing or suicidal

How you might behave:

- Avoiding activities you usually enjoy
- Finding it difficult to think clearly or concentrate on things
- Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much
- Self-harming or suicidal behaviour

.....
"Be kind to yourself.
If you need 'me time',
give it to yourself.
You are worth it."
.....



What causes depression?

There may not always be an obvious cause, however, some life experiences can make you more vulnerable to having depression. Those might include:

- Childhood experiences of neglect, abuse or trauma
- Physical health problems
- A history of depression within the family
- The impact of medication, drugs and alcohol

You might also find your depression has been triggered by an unwelcome, stressful or traumatic event, such as:

- The end of a relationship
- Bereavement
- Major life changes like losing your job, moving house or getting married
- Being bullied or abused

Taking care of yourself

Experiencing depression can make it hard to find the energy to look after yourself. But taking an active role in your recovery, and taking steps to help yourself cope, can make a big difference to how you feel. Here are some things you can try:

Look after yourself: Getting good sleep and eating well will help improve your mood and increase your energy levels.

Practise self-care: Be kind to yourself and include things that make you happy in your daily routine.

Keep active: Learning something new or volunteering can help boost your mood and make you feel better about yourself and less alone.

Challenge your low mood: Sometimes our thoughts are so routine we don't recognise when they are unhelpful. Try tracking changes in your mood through a mood diary.

Connect with other people: It might feel hard to start talking about what you're feeling, but talking to someone you trust can help you question your worries and see them in a different way.



Community support & treatment

Community support

Many different local community support options exist that can be effective in minimising the symptoms of depression:

- Peer support services
- Nature and greenspaces
- Volunteering

You can contact SAMH's information service for help finding community support local to you.

What treatment can I get for depression?

The most common treatments that your GP might offer are talking therapies and certain types of medication. This might vary depending on your diagnosis, but ideally they should offer you a talking therapy before prescribing medication.

Talking therapies

There are many different talking therapies that can be effective in treating depression:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – this could be one-to-one, group based, or online
- Interpersonal therapy (IPT)
- Behavioural activation

Medication

There are different types of medication which can be helpful in managing depression, but before prescribing these drugs your doctor should explain to you what the medication is for and discuss any possible side effects.

“Taking care of my diet and body, talking and alternative methods work far better for me.”



“Not putting extra pressure on me... letting me know you're there and that I don't have to do anything really helps.”

How can you help?

It can be really difficult when someone you care about is experiencing depression. Here's what you can do to help.

Be open about depression: Although it can be hard, try to be open about depression and difficult emotions so people around you know that it's OK to talk about what they're experiencing.

Keep in touch: It might be hard for people experiencing depression to keep up contact, so try to keep in touch. Even just a text message to let them know that you're thinking of them can make a big difference.

Don't be critical: If you've not experienced depression yourself, it can be hard to understand why people can't just 'snap out of it'. Try not to put too much pressure on them to get better straight away – they are probably being very critical towards themselves already.

Ask them how you can help: If someone is struggling, it can be tempting to do everything for them. Everyone will need different support, so asking them what they need, or how you can help, can support them to feel more in control of themselves.

Encourage them to seek help: If the person's depression is becoming a problem for them, you could encourage them to seek help. This could be support through local community services or their GP.

“Just a simple call or text asking how I am helps. I don't want sympathy, just to know they're there if I need them.”



Useful contacts

SAMH Information Service

0344 800 0550
info@samh.org.uk
www.samh.org.uk/information-service

Got a question about mental health or wellbeing? We can help. Contact us Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm.

Breathing Space

0800 83 85 87
www.breathingspace.scot

Confidential out of office hours telephone line for people experiencing low mood, anxiety or depression.

 Follow us on Twitter:
@SAMHtweets

 Follow us on Facebook:
/SAMHmentalhealth

 Follow us on Instagram:
@samhscotland

SCAN FOR MORE RESOURCES



SAMH
Scottish Action for Mental Health

Scottish Charity no. SC008897
Scottish Action for Mental Health
Brunswick House, 51 Wilson Street, Glasgow, G11UZ

© Mind. This booklet has been adapted from an original publication produced by Mind and published at www.mind.org.uk