



Mental Health Information - Depression

The word 'depression' is used in many different ways. Everyone can feel sad or 'blue' when bad things happen. However, everyday 'blues' or sadness is not depression.

Clinical depression means that symptoms last for at least 2 weeks and has emotional, mental and behavioural effects. It can also interfere with someone's ability to work and have satisfying personal relationships.

There are different types of depression; mild, moderate and severe, grief-related depression, post-natal depression, seasonal affective disorder (SAD), bipolar disorder (sometimes called manic depression).

Signs and symptoms

Emotional

- Down, upset or tearful
- Restless, agitated or irritable
- Isolated and unable to relate to other people
- Guilt worthless and down on yourself
- Hopeless and despairing
- A sense of unreality
- Empty and numb
- Finding no pleasure in things you usually enjoy
- No self-confidence or self-esteem
- Suicidal

Mental

- Catastrophic thinking
- Difficulty remembering things
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty making decisions

Changes in behaviour

- Avoiding social events and activities you usually enjoy
- Physical aches and pains with no obvious cause
- Using more tobacco, alcohol or other drugs than usual
- Losing interest in sex
- Moving very slowly, or being restless and agitated
- Self-harming or suicidal behaviour
- No appetite and losing weight, or eating too much and gaining weight
- Finding it difficult to speak or think clearly
- Difficulty remembering or concentrating on things
- Feeling tired all the time
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much

Helping someone with depression

Family and friends are an important source of support for people who are experiencing depression. People who feel supported by those around them recover faster.

If a family member or friend is depressed, you can help by;

- Listening to them without judgement or being critical
- Encouraging them to get appropriate professional help
- Checking if they're feeling suicidal, and if so, take immediate action to get help
- Providing the same support as you would for a physically ill person – sending get well cards or flowers, telephoning or visiting, helping out when they can't manage.

Bipolar Disorder

People with bipolar disorder have extreme mood swings. They experience periods of depression and mania, often with periods of 'normal' mood in between. During the episodes of depression, they will experience the symptoms of depression.

Symptoms of mania

- Increased energy and hyperactivity – the person may suddenly be able to do far more than usual. They will appear restless and unable to sit still
- Elated mood – they will feel high, happy, full of energy, invincible
- Needing less sleep than usual – they can go for days with very little sleep or none at all
- Irritability – especially if others disagree with their unrealistic plans or ideas. It's also a result of fatigue as they go longer and longer without proper rest
- Rapid thinking and speech – they may talk too much, too fast and keep changing the subject
- Lack of inhibitions – they may take risks, spend money extravagantly, be unusually forceful in expressing opinions or be very sexually active
- Grandiose delusions – they may believe that they are superhuman, especially talented or an important religious figure
- Lack of insight – they're convinced that their manic delusions are real so don't realise they're ill.

Ways to help you stay mentally healthy

- Keeping physically active
- Drinking alcohol in moderation
- Talking about your feelings
- Keeping it touch with friends and loved ones
- Learning new skills
- Asking for help
- Eating well
- Taking a break
- Caring for others
- Getting involved and making a contribution
- Doing something creative

Where you can get help

Your GP can help by;

- Looking for a possible cause for your depression - for example, side-effects of medication
- Explaining depression and the best way you can get help
- Referring you to a counsellor
- Sign-posting you to self-help materials
- Prescribing anti-depressant medication if needed
- Referring you to a psychiatrist, particularly if your depression is severe or long lasting

Other sources of support

- **Depression Alliance** - provides information and support to people with depression and their carers. They also list details of local self-help groups.
www.depressionalliance.org
0845 1232320
- **MIND** - offers materials on all aspects of depression and bipolar disorder. It also lists details of local Mind Associations.
www.mind.org.uk
Info Line: 0300 123 3393, info@mind.org.uk
Legal Line: 0300 466 6463
www.elefriends.co.uk - a free online self-help community run by Mind providing 'a safe place to listen, share and be heard'.
- **Bipolar UK** - a user-led charity working to help bipolar to take control of their lives. It provides advice and support for people with bipolar and their families and carers.
www.bipolaruk.org.uk
020 7931 6480

- **Samaritans** - offers confidential non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide.
www.samaritans.org
Call 116 123 - it's free.
- **Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)**
If you need support or just someone to talk to, the Co-op Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) is available 24 hours a day. If you're in the UK, you can call 0800 069 8854 (calls are free). If you're abroad, you can call 0044 141 846 1586 (overseas call charges apply). It's run by LifeWorks – a company that specialises in colleague helplines. It's totally confidential and they don't need to know which part of Co-op you work in.
- www.moodgym.anu.edu.au - an interactive website which teaches you ways of thinking that will help using cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)
- www.livinglifetothefull.co.uk - this site uses a self-help format to help you develop skills to tackle feelings of low mood, stress and distress
- www.getselfhelp.co.uk - this website offers free CBT self-help information and resources, including therapy worksheets