

# Learning to cope with depression



- If you haven't already done so, speak to your GP or other health professional. Getting a correct diagnosis is key to recovering from depression. Attend follow-up appointments and if it is some time since you have been diagnosed, do go back to your doctor again in case the condition has changed.
- Comply with treatment. Remember that medication can take some time to work (up to six weeks). Counselling and the other talking therapies can also take time to work. It is unrealistic to expect instant results.
- Access support services. Keep helpline numbers close to hand and consider attending a support group. Talking through particular concerns with someone who understands can bring much reassurance and enable you to learn new coping skills.
- Remember that exercise and spending time outdoors is important. Even going for a short walk each day or simply sitting in the park can bring benefits: fresh air, a sense of achievement and a break from usual routines which may be aggravating the depression. Engaging with nature can bring some relief.
- Try to eat a balanced and nutritious diet. Food does have an impact on mood. Sugary foods lead to a sharp drop in blood sugar later on and this leads to energy and mood slumps. Caffeine also has a negative impact, causing increased heart rate and interfering with sleep.
- Alcohol is a depressant and can prove a potent trigger to low mood, especially in individuals prone to depression. It can also interact dangerously with medication.
- Try to get adequate rest and sleep. Sleep problems can be a symptom of depression. If you are having difficulty with sleep look at your diet (caffeine or rich foods late in the evening can prevent sleep) and also think about getting some light exercise and fresh air later in the day.
- Many people find writing useful and it can have therapeutic benefits. Don't worry if you don't consider yourself a writer: simply writing a few sentences at the end of each day can help to relieve some concerns, and looking back over things you have written previously can show how far you have come. No one need ever read what you have written.
- Above all, do not try to deal with depression on your own. Reach out to family and friends, and where help and support is offered, take it. You are not alone.

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**1890 303 302**

Visit  
**[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)**

Email  
**[wecanhelp@aware.ie](mailto:wecanhelp@aware.ie)**



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# Depression: How to recognise it and what to do

## What causes it?

Depression has a number of possible causes. For some people, it comes about as a result of a traumatic life event such as bereavement, relationship breakdown or financial difficulties. In other situations, the person may have an inherent tendency towards depression.

Genetic factors can be key in the case of bipolar disorder, another type of mood disorder which involves periods of depression as well as periods of elation, where the mood is significantly higher than normal and the person may have excessive energy, little need for sleep and may have grandiose ideas and engage in risk-taking behaviour.

## What should I do if I think depression is a factor for me or my loved one?

The most important thing to do is speak to a doctor or mental health professional in order to get a correct diagnosis. There are a number of treatments for depression, depending on the cause and severity of symptoms and a professional is best placed to decide which, if any, treatment is most appropriate.

Aware provides information leaflets on depression as well as booklets on specific topics such as Bipolar Disorder, Depression in Later Life and Postnatal Depression. A booklet entitled Keeping Hope Alive, written specifically for family members is also available. Support services include a loCall Helpline open 365 days a year on 1890 303 302 (the helpline can be accessed from outside Ireland on +353 1 676 6166), as well as support groups for both individuals who experience depression and also for family members.

Depression is a very common condition which affects more than one person in ten at any one time. Any one of us, irrespective of age, gender or background can be affected.

It is possible to come through depression, and early recognition and ongoing support are key to a positive outcome.

## Depression: What is it?

Depression is a mental health condition which affects thinking, energy, feelings and behaviour. It can vary from mild to severe and can prove disabling in some cases, impacting on the individuals family and work life. It is possible to minimise the impact of depression by accessing information and support, and finding ways to manage the condition.

## How does it affect me?

Depression has eight main symptoms, and the advice is to speak to a GP or mental health professional if you notice five or more of these symptoms, lasting for a period of two weeks or more. The symptoms are:

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|----------|---|
| Feeling  | - sad, anxious or bored   |
| Energy   | - low energy, feeling tired or fatigued   |
| Sleep    | - under or over sleeping, frequent waking during the night  |
| Thinking | - poor concentration  |
| Interest | - loss of interest in hobbies, family or social life  |
| Value    | - low self esteem   |
| Aches    | - physical aches and pains with no physical basis<br>e.g. chest/head/tummy pain associated with anxiety or stress |
| Life     | - loss of interest in living, thinking about death, suicidal thoughts   |