

# Supporting a loved one through depression



- Access support services for yourself. It is important to mind your own health: it reduces your risk of mental health problems and also means you are better able to support your loved one.
- Support your loved one unconditionally when they are unwell. Non-judgemental listening can be a huge help as can practical support e.g. driving them to appointments or cooking a nutritious meal.
- It is essential to get a correct diagnosis, so encourage your loved one to see their GP or mental health professional if they have not already done so.
- Depression and other mood disorders cause emotional disturbance for the individual: this will impact on relationships. Acknowledge this so that you can minimise the disruptive effect.
- Seek information about the condition. Once you understand the nature of depression more fully you are better placed to deal with it.
- A three-person care team is the most effective way to deal with mood disorder, involving the individual, the doctor and a family member or close friend. The individual themselves may not be aware of certain aspects of their condition and the impact these have.
- Remember that difficult behaviours are part of the condition. If you are upset by a remark or behaviour, try not to react with anger. It is better to address this upset when the situation has diffused and open communication has been restored, after the depressive episode has passed.
- If you think your loved one may be suicidal, discuss this with him/her. This will not increase the risk of the person harming themselves, and indeed allowing them to discuss it with you may help to relieve some of these thoughts and feelings.
- Remember that it is not your fault: you did not choose that your loved one develop this condition, anymore than they did so don't allow a sense of guilt to dishearten you.
- Self-care is essential, so endeavour to take time out for yourself and try to make time for the things that matter in your own life as well.

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## 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: How to recognise it and what to do

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:

- 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  
e.g. chest/head/tummy pain associated with anxiety or stress
- Life - loss of interest in living, thinking about death, suicidal thoughts