

AWARE

**OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.**

**LET'S TALK
ABOUT...**

**HELPING
YOU WITH
DEPRESSION IN
LATER YEARS**

Sometimes, you may find yourself feeling down or fed-up, many people do. But these feelings don't tend to last, and are a normal response to problems or difficulties in everyday life.

But when these feelings don't go away, and become more than you can cope with, hindering your ability to live, work, and have good relationships with other people, it may be depression.

Depression is very common, with as many as 1 in 4 people being affected by it at some stage in their lives. Women are more likely to experience it, but both

men and women of any age and any background are susceptible.

But depression is particularly common among older people, affecting around 25% of those living in the community, and 40% of those in residential care homes at any one time. Recent studies show that between 8-12% of the population (more than

150,000 people in Northern Ireland) experience depression in any year, and depression is now the leading cause of disability worldwide according to the World Health Organisation.

What Causes Depression?

There is usually more than one cause or risk factor. Most of these fall into one of the following categories:



Heredity: having a parent or close relative who has had depression may increase your risk.



Environment: factors like poor housing, money worries, stress, relationship problems, physical illness, or loneliness.



Life events and experiences: If you have past issues like bereavement, abuse, bullying, job loss, relationship break-up, or divorce.



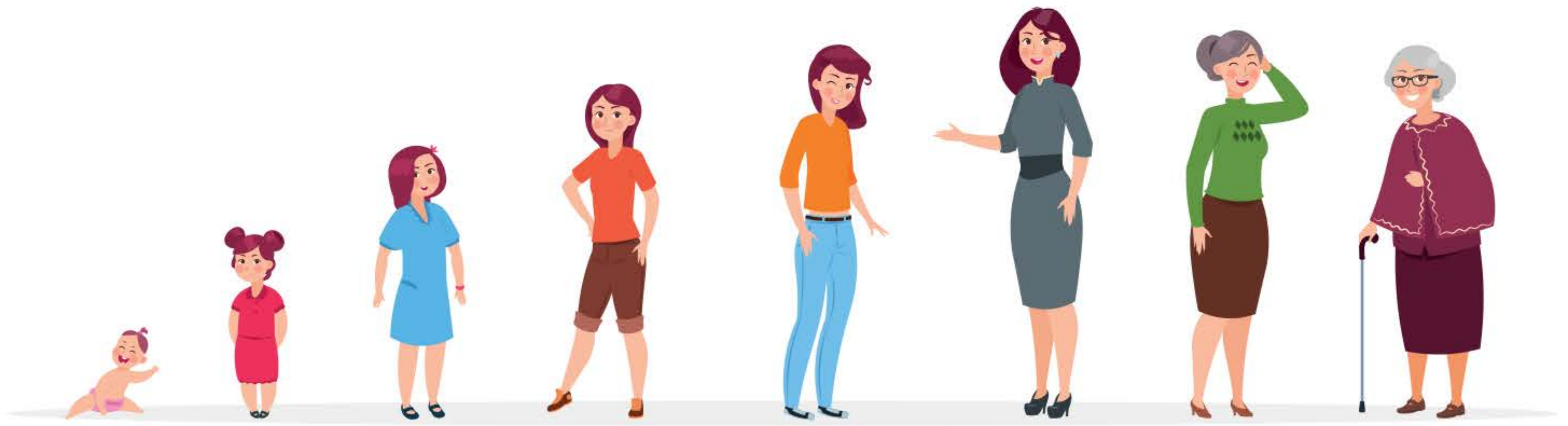
Personality: if you have a more sensitive personality or you have perfectionist tendencies, you are more vulnerable to depression.

Most people with depression probably fall into two or more of these categories, and the more factors that apply to you, the greater the risk. Sometimes there doesn't even seem to be any reason why you are depressed. But, it's not what happens to you, but how you deal with it that matters.

Why Are You More at Risk in Later Years?

There are a few reasons for this, including stopping work, having less money, loneliness, health problems, and the death of a partner or friends. But don't think of it as 'normal' or something that is inevitable. Read on to find out what signs to look out for, and how to help yourself if you think you might be depressed.





Symptoms of Depression

Look out for the following signs. If you've had at least two of the core symptoms for at least two weeks, think about getting some help.

- An unusually sad mood that doesn't go away.
- Loss of enjoyment or interest in activities that used to be enjoyable.
- Tiredness and lack of energy.

As well as these, you may also experience one or more of the following:

- You lose confidence in yourself, or have poor self-esteem;
- You feel guilty when you're not really at fault;
- You wish that you were dead;
- You have difficulty making decisions and concentrating;
- You move more slowly or become agitated and unable to settle;
- You have difficulty sleeping or sleep too much;
- You lose interest in food, or eat more than usual, leading to weight loss or weight gain.

The number and severity of symptoms you experience will determine whether the depression is diagnosed as mild, moderate or severe.

What Helps for Depression?

If you think you might be depressed, you should see your GP as soon as possible. Earlier treatment leads to a quicker and better recovery.

Your GP can also rule out any other medical cause for your symptoms. He/she will decide suitable treatment, depending on the severity of your symptoms.

Simple lifestyle changes or self-help strategies may be all that you need for mild depression, but your GP will want to keep an eye on this.

The **Four** Main Types of Help for Depression Are,



1 Talking Therapies (psychotherapies)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has been proven very effective for mild/moderate depression and in preventing relapse. It works on the basis that if you change your unhelpful thinking patterns and behaviour it will improve how you feel.

Self-help books based on CBT, and computerised CBT are also available., and there are other types of therapy and counselling. Ask your GP to tell you about them. Any of these may be used with or without medication.

2 Medication

Antidepressants are the most commonly prescribed and effective treatments for moderate or severe depression. It is important, however, to take them exactly as prescribed and only to stop taking them as and when advised by your GP.

They are not addictive, but stopping them suddenly or too soon may cause a relapse. They work by boosting certain brain chemicals that affect your mood. Any side effects usually disappear or are tolerable, although you should tell your GP as soon as possible if you experience them.

3 Self-help strategies

When you feel depressed, you tend to do less and less because of the tiredness, difficulty sleeping and/or eating, and negative thinking. You stop doing things you used to enjoy. It can get so bad that you can't go to work, or do day-to-day things at home.

You stay in bed or stay at home doing very little and isolate yourself from friends and family. But simply increasing your activity levels can make a big impact on your mood.

4 Mindfulness

This is another proven method of improving our mental health. It is 'living in the here and now', paying attention to the present moment using meditation and breathing, and it helps you become more aware of your thoughts and feelings. So, instead of being overwhelmed by them, you are able to manage them better.



The 5 most evidenced based steps to improving your mental health are:



1. Be Active - Exercise acts as an antidepressant. Research has shown that 50 minutes of brisk walking 4 times a week significantly reduces depression.



2. Take Notice - Savour the moment, be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.



3. Give - Do something nice for a friend or stranger. Smile. Volunteer your time, or consider joining a community group.



4. Connect - With the people around you - family, friends or neighbours. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.



5. Keep learning - Do not be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.



Do One Thing

Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed when taking steps to help yourself. But remember to focus on doing just one thing at a time. It will help you to reach the goals you set, and get a real sense of achievement.

More important steps to take towards recovery

- Avoid alcohol or keep it to a safe limit.
- Be physically active regularly.
- Maintain a regular sleep routine.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Reduce caffeine intake.
- Talk about it with someone you trust.
- Challenge your thinking - is it fact or opinion?

Who to contact for support



Lifeline

Lifeline is a telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress or despair. It is available 24/7 and is free to call from your mobile phone.

They can give you immediate support, offer you a face-to-face appointment, or give you information about other services in your area. **Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.**

You could also

- **See your doctor**
- **Call the out-of-hours GP service**
- **Go to the A&E department**
- **Call emergency services on 999**
- **Call Samaritans on their freephone helpline 116 123.**

This is a confidential service that provides a listening ear to those in distress.

You can read our other guides for more information on help with depression, and looking after your mental health.

Find out how we can help and support you.
Please visit our website or contact us:

Visit: www.aware-ni.org.uk
Email: info@aware-ni.org
Call us: Belfast 028 9035 7820
Derry/L'Derry 028 7126 0602



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