

AWARE

**OVERCOMING DEPRESSION.
CHANGING LIVES.**

LET'S TALK ABOUT

**HELPING
YOU WITH
DEPRESSION**

Sometimes, you may feel 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.

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.

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Depression is very common, with as many as 1 in 5 people living with mental ill-health in Northern Ireland.

Depression can affect anyone, however, women are more likely to get depression than men.

(Mental Health Foundation NI, 2023)



What Causes Depression?

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



1. Heredity

Having a parent or close relative who has had depression may increase your risk.



2. Environment

Factors like poor housing, money worries, stress, relationship problems, physical illness, or loneliness.



3. Life Events & Experiences

Such as bereavement, abuse, bullying, job loss, divorce or relationship break-up.



4. Personality

If you have a more sensitive personality or perfectionist tendencies, you are more vulnerable to depression.

Most people with depression often 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.

Symptoms of Depression

Look out for the following signs. If you've had at least two core symptoms for at least two weeks, we encourage you to reach out for help.

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

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

-  **A loss of confidence in yourself or poor self-esteem.**
-  **Feeling guilty when you're not really at fault.**
-  **Feeling that you wish you were dead.**
-  **Difficulty making decisions or concentrating.**
-  **You move more slowly or become agitated and difficult to settle.**
-  **Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.**
-  **Loss of appetite or eating 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 Can Help?

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. They will decide on 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

TALKING THERAPIES (PSYCHOTHERAPIES)

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

Self-help books and computerised CBT are also available. Other therapies and counselling options exist—ask your GP for advice. Any of these may be used with or without medication.

MEDICATION

Antidepressants are the most commonly prescribed and effective treatment for moderate/severe depression. It's important to take them exactly as prescribed and only stop taking them as and when advised by your GP. You should tell your GP as soon as possible if you experience side effects from antidepressants, even if they disappear or are tolerable.

They work by boosting certain brain chemicals that affect your mood. Any side effects disappear or are tolerable, although you should tell your GP as soon as possible if you experience them.

SELF-HELP STRATEGIES

When you feel depressed, you tend to do less because of tiredness, difficulty eating and/or sleeping, and negative thinking. You stop doing the things you enjoy. It can get so bad that you can't go to work or do day-to-day stuff at home. You may find yourself staying in bed or at home, doing very little and isolating yourself from loved ones. Simply increasing your activity levels can make a significant impact on your mood.

MINDFULNESS

Another proven method for boosting mental wellbeing. It helps you develop skills and techniques to cope with the daily challenges a busy life can bring, such as stress and anxiety. It involves making a special effort to give your full attention to what is happening in the present moment and to what's happening in your body, mind, and surroundings.

Other Self-Help Methods

- Avoid alcohol or keep it to a safe limit.
- Maintain a regular sleep routine.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Reduce caffeine intake.
- Talk about it with someone you trust.



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



1. Be Active

Our bodies release feel-good hormones when we're active that can also reduce anxiety and stress, and help us sleep better.



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 loved one 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

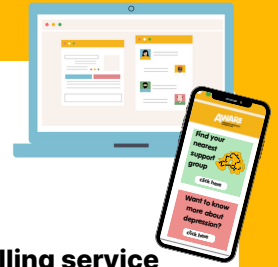
Do not be afraid to try something new. Rediscover an old hobby or interest, or simply set a challenge you will enjoy.



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 reach the goals you set and give you a real sense of achievement.

Who to Contact for Support



Lifeline

A telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress. It is available 24/7 and free to call.

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

You could also:

- See your GP or 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 - a confidential listening service for those in distress

AWARE NI

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

Contact us by emailing info@aware-ni.org and visit our website at aware-ni.org

AWARE NI also have FREE mental health support groups for anyone aged 18 or over. You can find your nearest one by searching: aware-ni.org/support-groups/

