

# DEPRESSION

Depression is very common - one in five people become depressed at some point in their lives. Anyone can get low at times, but someone is said to be suffering from depression when these feelings don't go away quickly or become so bad they interfere with their everyday life.

What does it feel like to be depressed?  
The feeling of depression is deeper, longer and more unpleasant than the short episodes of unhappiness that everyone experiences occasionally.

## Symptoms

**In the mind:** losing interest in life; finding it harder to make decisions; not coping with things that used to be manageable

**In the body:** feeling exhausted; feeling restless and agitated; loss of appetite and weight; difficulties getting to sleep.

## Causes

Sometimes there may be an obvious reason for becoming depressed, sometimes not. There is usually more than one reason and reasons are different for different people. The reason may seem obvious – a relationship breakdown or a bereavement or even the birth of a child – sometimes it is not clear. Either way, these feelings can become so bad that you need help.

## Seeking help

There are two types of treatment available: talking treatments and medication. Both can be accessed through your doctor.

### Talking treatments:

Counselling enables you to talk about your feelings to an objective, professional person. Your GP may have a counsellor at the surgery who you can talk to.

*Cognitive Behavioural Therapy* (CBT) helps people overcome the negative thoughts that can sometimes be the cause of depression.

*Interpersonal and dynamic therapies* can be helpful if you find it difficult to get on with other people. If your depression seems connected with your relationship with your partner, then a relationship counsellor might be helpful.

If you have become depressed while suffering from a disability or caring for a relative, then a self-help group may give you the support you need.

### Medication

Antidepressants can be effective if your depression is severe or goes on for a long time. They may help you to feel less anxious and cope better so that you can start to enjoy life and deal with problems effectively again. It is important to remember that you won't feel the effect of antidepressants straight away. People often don't notice any improvement in their mood for 2 or 3 weeks.

Like all medicines, antidepressants do have some side-effects, though these are usually mild and tend to wear off as the treatment goes on. The newer antidepressants (called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or SSRIs) may make you feel a bit sick at first and feel a little more anxious for a short while. The older antidepressants can cause a dry mouth and constipation. Unless the side-effects are very bad, your doctor is likely to advise you to carry on with the tablets. You may get withdrawal symptoms if you stop antidepressants suddenly – these can include anxiety, diarrhoea, vivid dreams or possibly nightmares. This can nearly always be avoided by slowly reducing the dose before stopping.

*Which is right for me – talking treatments or tablets?* It depends on how your depression has developed and how severe it is. On the whole, talking treatments have been found to be effective in mild and moderate depression. Medication is not thought to be helpful in mild depression. If your depression is severe, you are more likely to need antidepressants, usually for a period of 7-9 months.

### Self-help

Talking to someone close to you about how you feel can help. Going over a painful experience several times and crying it out can allow the mind to heal. Another strategy is to do something – go outside for a walk or some other form of exercise. This will help you to keep fit and hopefully, sleep better. You can also do jobs around the house to try and take your mind off thoughts that make you depressed. Make sure you eat well even though you may not feel like it and don't drink alcohol as this makes depression worse, although it might not seem to at first. Try not to get worried if you can't sleep but do something relaxing in bed such as reading, listening to soothing music, or listening to the radio. If you think you know what is causing your depression, it can help to write down the problem and then think of the things you could do to tackle it. Pick the best actions and see if they work. Also try to keep hopeful. Remember this is a very common experience and you will come through it, probably stronger and more able to cope than before.

### Useful contacts

Shine: Helpline 1890 621 631

Website [www.shineonline.ie](http://www.shineonline.ie)

College of Psychiatry of Ireland:

[www.irishpsychiatry.ie](http://www.irishpsychiatry.ie)

Aware: Helpline: 1890 30 33 02