

# Feeling down and depression

## What is depression?

Everyone feels sad or down from time to time. This can be a natural reaction to something difficult that happens, or the feelings may appear without any clear reason. There is no clear line between low mood and depression, but for a diagnosis of depression, the symptoms must be more severe and persist for a longer period. Depression is a common condition. Almost one in three women and one in four men will experience it at some point in their lives.

If you feel low, lacking energy, and have lost interest in activities you previously enjoyed, these may be signs of depression. Things you usually enjoy may start to feel meaningless, and you might begin to withdraw from family and friends.

## Physical and psychological symptoms

Depression can cause several different symptoms such as headaches, stomach problems and tension in the body. You may also experience cognitive symptoms, that is, changes in how you think and act. These symptoms usually manifest themselves through:

- persistent depression almost daily
- anxiety
- anxiety through rumination and repetitive worrying thoughts
- fatigue
- low energy or loss of interest in activities
- reduced sex drive
- difficulty concentrating and memory problems
- feelings of meaninglessness
- thoughts about death or thoughts of wanting to die.

If you have thoughts of harming yourself, it is important that you tell your therapist.

## Why do you get depressed?

There are many different reasons for depression and the causes differ from person to person. Depression can be triggered by many different factors, such as:

- starting a new job

- chronic stress
- moving to a new town
- separation
- financial difficulties
- loss of a loved one.

Depression is often due to a combination of several different factors. You can also become depressed without a clear reason.

Some people are more vulnerable to depression than others and may experience it more frequently. Research suggests that this increased vulnerability can be hereditary.

## **What can you do yourself?**

Whether you are experiencing low mood or have been diagnosed with depression, the same things usually help. Just as the causes of depression differ from person to person, the need for treatment also differs. If you feel depressed, it is important to keep yourself active and continue doing things you normally enjoy, even if your motivation has decreased. Research has shown that staying active and engaging in physical activity can be very helpful.

Enjoyment and motivation usually increase when you do something fun and pleasurable. But when the desire isn't there as it used to be, it's important to try to do things anyway. Even if it doesn't feel as enjoyable right now, the likelihood of appreciating it again increases over time. Completely stopping activities you usually enjoy will likely make it harder to get going again, as the initial effort required will be greater.

When you feel low, you may want to withdraw and isolate yourself. This can feel like a temporary relief, but it does not help with depression. Instead, try to spend time with the people you normally enjoy being with when you feel well. It is also important to exercise, sleep and eat well.

## **Exercise and physical activity**

Exercise and physical activity are an important piece of the puzzle for our mental health. Exercise usually helps reduce depressive symptoms and increases positive feelings. It is often noticeable immediately afterwards and can last up to a day. Physical activity is also helpful in the long term. It can help improve well-being during bouts of depression and also help prevent future episodes. Research shows that physical activity can reduce depressive symptoms to the same extent as treatment with anti-depressant medications or psychological therapy. Although higher intensity exercise seems to have

the best effect, walking has also been shown to have a positive effect. The takeaway is that everything counts.

## **Sleep**

Sleep is often negatively affected by depression. You may have trouble falling asleep, experience restless sleep, or wake up frequently. You may also find that you are sleeping more than before. It can be difficult to control how tired you feel and to be able to fall asleep in the evening. What you can control, however, is when you get out of bed in the morning. Try to get out of bed at the same time every morning and don't spend too much time in bed. How much is "too much" varies individually, but generally, adults need between six and nine hours of sleep per night.

Depression can trick you into thinking you need more sleep than you actually do. It's impossible to sleep your way out of depression, even if it feels good at the moment. The key is rather to find a balance between activity and rest.

## **Food**

Changes in appetite are a symptom of depression. Like with sleep, this can mean eating significantly more or less than usual. It is important to try to maintain regular routines and consistency with meals. Overall diet quality matters. Some basic advice includes eating a varied diet, preferably with whole-grain or "keyhole" options, plenty of vegetables, and limiting sweets, cookies, and ice cream.

## **Seek help**

If you have thoughts that you can't go on living or thoughts about taking your own life, it's important to seek help immediately. Go to a psychiatric emergency department or call 112.