

TEENAGER'S GUIDE TO DEPRESSION

TIPS AND TOOLS FOR HELPING YOURSELF OR A FRIEND

TEEN DEPRESSION: A GUIDE FOR TEENAGERS

The teenage years can be tough, and it's perfectly normal to feel sad or irritable every now and then. But if these feelings don't go away or become so intense that you can't handle them, you may be suffering from depression. The good news is that you don't have to feel this way. Help is available and you have more power than you think. There are many things you can do to help yourself or a friend start feeling better.

WHAT DEPRESSION FEELS LIKE

When you're depressed, it can feel like no one understands. But depression is far more common in teens than you may think. You are not alone and your depression is not a hopeless case. Even though it can feel like depression will never lift, it eventually will—and with proper treatment and healthy choices, that day can come even sooner.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE DEPRESSION	
GIRLS TEND TO:	BOYS TEND TO:
BLAME THEMSELVES	BLAME OTHERS
FEEL SAD, APATHETIC AND WORTHLESS	FEEL ANGRY, IRRITABLE AND EGO-INFLATED
FEEL ANXIOUS AND SCARED	FEEL SUSPICIOUS AND GUARDED
AVOID CONFLICTS AT ALL COSTS	CREATE CONFLICTS
FEEL SLOWED-DOWN AND NERVOUS	FEEL RESTLESS AND AGITATED
HAVE TROUBLE SETTING BOUNDARIES	NEED TO FEEL IN CONTROL AT ALL COSTS
FIND IT EASY TO TALK ABOUT SELF-DOUBT AND DESPAIR	FIND IT "WEAK" TO ADMIT SELF-DOUBT OR DESPAIR
USE FOOD, FRIENDS AND "LOVE" TO SELF-MEDICATE	USE ALCOHOL, TV, SPORTS AND SEX TO SELF-MEDICATE

Adapted from: *Male Menopause* by Jed Diamond

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF TEEN DEPRESSION

It's hard to put into words how depression feels, and people experience it differently. There are, however, some common problems and symptoms that teens with depression experience:

- *You constantly feel irritable, sad, or angry.*
- *Nothing seems fun anymore, and you just don't see the point of trying.*
- *You feel bad about yourself*—worthless, guilty, or just "wrong" in some way

- *You sleep too much or not enough.*
- *You have frequent, unexplained headaches or other physical problems.*
- *Anything and everything makes you cry.*
- *You've gained or lost weight without consciously trying to.*
- *You just can't concentrate.* Your grades may be plummeting because of it.
- *You feel helpless and hopeless.*
- *You're thinking about death or suicide.* (If this is true, talk to someone right away!)

IS YOUR FRIEND DEPRESSED?

If you're a teenager with a friend who seems down or troubled, you may suspect depression. But how do you know it's not just a passing phase or a bad mood?

Look for common warning signs of teen depression:

- *Your friend doesn't want to do the things you guys used to love to do.*
- *Your friend starts using alcohol or drugs or hanging with a bad crowd.*
- *Your friend stops going to classes and after-school activities.*
- *Your friend talks about being bad, ugly, stupid, or worthless.*
- *Your friend starts talking about death or suicide.*

WHEN TEEN DEPRESSION TURNS DEADLY

If your feelings become so overwhelming that you can't see any solution besides harming yourself or others, you need to get help right away. And yet, asking for help when you're in the midst of such strong emotions can be really tough. If talking to a stranger might be easier for you, you can call the following numbers:

HELPLINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz

thelowdown.co.nz – or email team@thelowdown.co.nz or free text 5626 (emails and text messages will be responded to between 12 noon and 12 midnight)

What's Up – 0800 942 8787 (for 5–18 year olds; 1 pm to 11 pm daily)

Kidslife – 0800 54 37 54 (0800 kidsline) aimed at children up to 14 years of age; 4pm to 6pm weekdays

TALKING TO AN ADULT YOU TRUST ABOUT TEEN DEPRESSION

It may seem like there's no way your parents will be able to help, especially if they are always nagging you or getting angry about your behaviour. The truth is, parents hate to see their kids hurting. They may feel frustrated because they don't understand what is going on with you or know how to help.

Many parents don't know enough about depression to recognise it in their own kids, so it may be up to you to educate them. You can refer them to www.helpguide.org or look for further information online. Letting your parents know that you are feeling depressed will probably motivate them to get you the help you need.

If your parents are abusive in any way, or if they have problems of their own that makes it difficult for them to take care of you, find another adult you trust (such as a relative, teacher, counsellor, or coach). This person can either help you approach your parents, or direct you toward the support you need. If you

truly don't have anyone you can talk to, you can text or email The Key to Life Charitable Trust +6421448789, mikeking@keytolife.org.nz

No matter what, talk to someone, especially if you are having any thoughts of harming yourself or others. Asking for help is the bravest thing you can do, and the first step on your way to feeling better.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCEPTING AND SHARING YOUR FEELINGS

It can be hard to open up about how you're feeling—especially when you're feeling depressed, hopeless, ashamed, or worthless. It's important to remember that everyone struggles with feelings like these at one time or another. They don't mean you're weak, fundamentally flawed, or no good. Accepting your feelings and opening up about them with someone you trust will help you feel less alone.

No matter what it feels like, people love and care about you, and if you can muster the courage to talk about your depression, it can—and will—be resolved. Some people think that talking about sad feelings will make them worse, but the opposite is almost always true. It is very helpful to share your worries with someone who will listen and care. They don't need to be able to "fix" you; they just need to be good listeners.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO FEEL BETTER: TIPS FOR DEPRESSED TEENS

Depression is not your fault, and you didn't do anything to cause it. However, you do have some control over feeling better. Staying connected to friends and family, making healthy lifestyle decisions, and keeping stress under control can all have a hugely positive impact on your mood.

In the meantime, you might need therapy or medication to help you while you sort out your feelings. Look into your treatment options with your parents. If medication is being considered, do your research before making a decision, as some antidepressants used for adults can actually make teens feel worse.

TRY NOT TO ISOLATE YOURSELF

When you're depressed, you may not feel like seeing anybody or doing anything. Just getting out of bed in the morning can be difficult, but isolating yourself only makes depression worse. Make it a point to stay social, even if that's the last thing you want to do. As you get out into the world, you may find yourself feeling better.

Spend time with friends, especially those who are active, upbeat, and make you feel good about yourself. Avoid hanging out with those who abuse drugs or alcohol, get you into trouble, or who make you feel insecure. It's also a good idea to limit the time you spend playing video games or surfing online.

KEEP YOUR BODY HEALTHY

Making healthy lifestyle choices can do wonders for your mood. Things like diet and exercise have been shown to help depression. Ever heard of a "runners high"? Exercising releases a rush of endorphins, which makes you feel instantly happier. Physical activity can be as effective as medications or therapy for depression, so get involved in sports, ride your bike, or take a dance class. Any activity helps! Even a short walk can be beneficial.

As for food, an improper diet can make you feel sluggish and tired, which worsens depression symptoms. Your body needs vitamins and minerals such as iron and B-vitamins. Make sure you're feeding your mind with plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Talk to your parents, doctor or school nurse about how to ensure your diet is adequately nutritious.



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AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

You may be tempted to drink or use drugs in an effort to escape from your feelings and get a “mood boost,” even if just for a short time. However, substance use can not only make depression worse, but can cause you to become depressed in the first place. Alcohol and drug use can also increase suicidal feelings. In short, drinking and taking drugs will make you feel worse—not better—in the long run.

If you’re addicted to alcohol or drugs, seek help. You will need special treatment for your substance problem on top of whatever treatment you’re receiving for your depression.

ASK FOR HELP IF YOU’RE STRESSED

Stress and worry can take a big toll, even leading to depression. Talk to a teacher or school counsellor if exams or classes seem overwhelming. Likewise, if you have a health concern you feel you can’t talk to your parents about—such as a pregnancy scare or drug problem—seek medical attention at a clinic or see a doctor. A health professional can help you approach your parents (if that is required) and guide you toward appropriate treatment. Your GP may be able to refer you to funded counselling through their primary mental health programme, so

always ask if that is available. If you’re dealing with relationship, friendship, or family problems, talk to an adult you trust. Your school may have a counsellor you can go to for help, or you may want to ask your parents to make an appointment for you to see a therapist.

HELPING A DEPRESSED FRIEND

Depressed teens typically rely on their friends more than their parents or other adults in their lives, so you may find yourself in the position of being the first—or only—person that they talk to about their feelings. While this might seem like a huge responsibility, there are many things you can do to help.

- **Get your friend to talk to you.** Starting a conversation about depression can be daunting, but you can say something simple: “You seem like you are really down, and not yourself. I really want to help you. Is there anything I can do?”
- **Know that your friend doesn’t expect you to have the answers.** Your friend probably just needs someone to listen and be supportive. By listening and responding in a non-judgmental and reassuring manner, you are helping in a major way.

- **Encourage your friend to get help.** Urge your depressed friend to talk to a parent, teacher, or counsellor. It might be scary for your friend to admit to an authority figure that there is a problem. Having you there might help, so offer to go along for support.
- **Stick with your friend through the hard times.** Depression can make people do and say things that are hurtful or strange. But your friend is going through a very difficult time, so try not to take it personally. Once your friend gets help, he or she will go back to being the person you know and love. In the meantime, make sure you have other friends or family taking care of you. Your feelings are important and need to be respected, too.
- **Speak up if your friend is suicidal.** If your friend is joking or talking about suicide, giving possessions away, or saying goodbye, tell a trusted adult immediately. Your only responsibility at this point is to get your friend help, and get it fast. Even if you promised not to tell, your friend needs your help. It’s better to have a friend who is temporarily angry at you than one who is no longer alive.

Credit www.helpguide.org



The Key To Life Charitable Trust

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A PARENT'S GUIDE TO TEEN DEPRESSION

LEARN THE SIGNS OF DEPRESSION IN TEENS AND HOW YOU CAN HELP

TEEN DEPRESSION: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

The biggest hurdle teens face when they are having problems is the reaction they get from their parents. Parents who categorise their teen's complaints as "teenage angst, puberty blues, and growing pains" risk further isolating their already vulnerable kids. Teenage depression isn't just bad moods and the occasional melancholy—it's a serious problem that impacts every aspect of a teen's life. Teen depression can lead to drug and alcohol abuse, self-loathing and self-mutilation, pregnancy, violence, and even suicide. But as a concerned parent, teacher or friend, there are many ways you can help. Talking about the problem and offering support can go a long way toward getting your teenager back on track.

UNDERSTANDING TEEN DEPRESSION

There are as many misconceptions about teen depression as there are about teenagers in general. Yes, the teen years are tough, but most teens balance the requisite angst with good friendships, success in school or outside activities, and the development of a strong sense of self.

Occasional bad moods or acting-out is to be expected, but depression is something different. Depression can destroy the very essence of a teenager's personality, causing an overwhelming sense of sadness, despair, or anger.

Whether the incidences of teen depression are actually increasing, or we're just becoming more aware of them, the fact remains that depression strikes teenagers far more often than most people think. And although depression is highly treatable, experts say only one in five depressed teens receives help. Unlike adults, who have the ability to seek assistance on their own, teenagers usually must rely on parents, teachers, or other caregivers to recognise their suffering and get them the treatment they need. So if you have an adolescent in your life, it's important to learn what teen depression looks like and what to do if you spot the warning signs.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF TEEN DEPRESSION

Teenagers face a host of pressures, from the changes of puberty to questions about who they are and where they fit in. The natural transition from child to adult can also bring parental conflict as teens start to assert their independence. With all this drama, it isn't always easy to differentiate between depression and normal teenage moodiness. Making things even more complicated, teens with depression do not necessarily appear sad, nor do they always withdraw from others. For some depressed teens, symptoms of irritability, aggression, and rage are more prominent.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION IN TEENS

- *Sadness or hopelessness*
- *Irritability, anger, or hostility*
- *Tearfulness or frequent crying*
- *Withdrawal from friends and family*
- *Loss of interest in activities*
- *Changes in eating and sleeping habits*
- *Restlessness and agitation*
- *Feelings of worthlessness and guilt*
- *Lack of enthusiasm and motivation*
- *Fatigue or lack of energy*
- *Difficulty concentrating*
- *Thoughts of death or suicide.*

If you're unsure if an adolescent in your life is depressed or just "being a teenager", consider how long the symptoms have been present, how severe they are, and how differently the teen is acting from his or her usual self. While some "growing pains" are to be expected as teenagers grapple with the challenges of growing up, dramatic, long-lasting changes in personality, mood, or behaviour are red flags of a deeper problem.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TEENAGE & ADULT DEPRESSION

Depression in teens can look very different from depression in adults. The following symptoms of depression are more common in teenagers than in their adult counterparts:

- **Irritable or angry mood** – As noted above, irritability rather than sadness is often the predominant mood in depressed teens. A depressed teenager may be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated or prone to angry outbursts.
- **Unexplained aches and pains** – Depressed teens frequently complain about physical ailments such as headaches or stomach aches. If a thorough physical exam does not reveal a medical cause, these aches and pains may indicate depression.
- **Extreme sensitivity to criticism** – Depressed teens are plagued by feelings of worthlessness, making them extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection and failure. This is a particular problem for "over-achievers."
- **Withdrawing from some, but not all people** – while adults tend to isolate themselves when depressed, teenagers usually keep up at least some friendships. However, teens with depression may socialise less than before, pull away from their parents, or start hanging out with a different crowd.

EFFECTS OF TEEN DEPRESSION

The negative effects of teenage depression go far beyond a melancholy mood. Many rebellious and unhealthy behaviours or attitudes in teenagers are actually indications of depression. The following are some the ways in which teens "act-out" or "act-in" in an attempt to cope with their emotional pain:

- **Problems at school** - Depression can cause low energy and concentration difficulties. At school, this may lead to poor attendance, a drop in grades or frustration with schoolwork in a formerly good student.
- **Running away** - Many depressed teens run away from home or talk about running away. Such attempts are usually a cry for help.
- **Drug and alcohol abuse** - Teens may use alcohol or drugs in an attempt to "self-medicate" their depression. Unfortunately, substance abuse only makes things worse.
- **Low self-esteem** - Depression can trigger and intensify feelings of ugliness, shame, failure and unworthiness.
- **Internet addiction** - Teens may go online to escape their problems, but excessive computer use only increases their isolation, making them more depressed.
- **Reckless behaviour** - Depressed teens may engage in dangerous or high-risk behaviours such as reckless driving, out-of-control drinking and unsafe sex.
- **Violence** - Some depressed teens—usually boys who are the victims of bullying—become violent.



Teen depression is also associated with a number of other mental health problems, including eating disorders and self-injury.

TIPS FOR TALKING TO A DEPRESSED TEEN

- **Offer support** - Let depressed teenagers know that you're there for them, fully and unconditionally. Hold back from asking a lot of questions (teenagers don't like to feel patronised or crowded), but make it clear that you're ready and willing to provide whatever support they need.
- **Be gentle but persistent** - Don't give up if your adolescent shuts you out at first. Talking about depression can be very tough for teens and a lot of well-meaning parents attempts to "fix-it", are not helpful to your teen. Asking "what can I do that is most helpful to you" is often better. Be respectful of your child's comfort level while still emphasising your concern and willingness to listen.
- **Listen without lecturing** - Resist any urge to criticise or pass judgment once your teenager begins to talk. The important thing is that your child is communicating. Avoid offering unsolicited advice or ultimatums as well.
- **Validate feelings** - Don't try to talk your teen out of his or her depression, even if his or her feelings or concerns appear silly or irrational to you. Simply acknowledge the pain and sadness he or she is feeling. If you don't, he or she will feel like you don't take his or her emotions seriously.

GETTING TREATMENT FOR TEEN DEPRESSION

Depression is very damaging when left untreated, so don't wait and hope that the symptoms will go away. If you see depression's warning signs, seek professional help.

Make an immediate appointment for your teen to see the family physician for a depression screening. Be prepared to give your doctor specific information about your teen's depression symptoms, including how long they've been present, how much they're affecting your child's daily life, and any patterns you've noticed. The doctor should also be told about any close relatives who have ever been diagnosed with depression or other mental health disorders. As part of the depression screening, the doctor will give your teenager a complete physical exam and take blood samples to check for medical causes of your child's symptoms.

Your GP may be able to refer you to funded counselling through their primary mental health programme, so always ask if that is available.

SEEK OUT A DEPRESSION SPECIALIST

If there are no health problems that are causing your teenager's depression, ask your doctor to refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist who specialises in children and adolescents. Depression in teens can be tricky, particularly when it comes to treatment options such as medication. A mental health professional with advanced training and a strong background treating adolescents is the best bet for your teenager's best care.

When choosing a specialist, always get your child's input. Teenagers are dependent on parents for making many of their health decisions, so listen to what they're telling you. No one therapist is a miracle worker, and no one treatment works for everyone. If your child feels uncomfortable or is just not



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"connecting" with the psychologist or psychiatrist, ask for a referral to another provider who may be better suited to your teenager.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Expect a discussion with the specialist you've chosen about treatment possibilities for your son or daughter. There are a number of treatment options for depression in teenagers, including one-on-one talk therapy, group or family therapy and medication.

Talk therapy is often a good initial treatment for mild to moderate cases of depression. Over the course of therapy, your teen's depression may resolve. If it doesn't, medication may be warranted. However, antidepressants should only be used as part of a broader treatment plan.

Unfortunately, some parents feel pushed into choosing antidepressant medication over other treatments that may be cost-prohibitive or time-intensive. However, unless your child is considered to be high-risk for suicide (in which case medication and/or constant observation may be necessary), you have time to carefully weigh your options before committing to antidepressant medication. This should always be seen as a last resort.

RISKS OF TEENAGE ANTIDEPRESSANT USE

In severe cases of depression, medication may help ease symptoms. However, antidepressants aren't always the best treatment option. They come with risks and side-effects of their own, including a number of safety concerns specific to children and young adults. It's important to weigh the benefits against the risks before starting your teen on medication.

TEENS ON ANTIDEPRESSANTS: RED FLAGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

Call a doctor if you notice...

- **New or more thoughts of suicide**
- **Failed suicide attempts**
- **New or worse depression**
- **New or worse anxiety**
- **Feeling very agitated or restless**
- **Panic attacks**
- **Difficulty sleeping (insomnia)**
- **New or worse irritability**
- **Acting aggressive, being angry or violent**
- **Acting on dangerous impulses**
- **Being extremely hyperactive in actions and talking (hypomania or mania)**
- **Other unusual changes in behaviour**

SUPPORTING A TEEN THROUGH DEPRESSION TREATMENT

As the depressed teenager in your life goes through treatment, the most important thing you can do is to let him or her know that you're there to listen and offer support. Now more than ever, your teenager needs to know that he or she is valued,

accepted and cared for.

- **Be understanding.** Living with a depressed teenager can be difficult and draining. At times, you may experience exhaustion, rejection, despair, aggravation or any other number of negative emotions. During this trying time, it's important to remember that your child is not being difficult on purpose. Your teen is suffering, so do your best to be patient and understanding.
- **Encourage physical activity.** Encourage your teenager to stay active. Exercise can go a long way toward relieving the symptoms of depression, so find ways to incorporate it into your teenager's day. Something as simple as walking the dog or going on a bike ride can be beneficial.
- **Encourage social activity.** Isolation only makes depression worse, so encourage your teenager to see friends and praise efforts to socialise. Offer to take your teen out with friends or suggest social activities that might be of interest, such as sports, after-school clubs or an art class.
- **Stay involved in treatment.** Make sure your teenager is following all treatment instructions and going to therapy. It's especially important that your child takes any prescribed medication as instructed. Track changes in your teen's condition and call the doctor if depression symptoms seem to be getting worse.
- **Learn about depression.** Just like you would if your child had a disease you knew very little about, read up on depression so that you can be your own "expert." The more you know, the better equipped you'll be to help your depressed teen. Encourage your teenager to learn more about depression as well. Reading up on his or her condition can help a depressed teen realise that he or she is not alone, giving your child a better understanding of what he or she is going through.

The road to your depressed teenager's recovery may be bumpy, so be patient. Rejoice in small victories and prepare for the occasional setback. Most importantly, don't judge yourself or compare your family to others. As long as you're doing your best to get your teen the necessary help, you're doing your job.

TAKING CARE OF THE WHOLE FAMILY WHEN ONE CHILD IS DEPRESSED

As a parent dealing with teen depression, you may find yourself focusing all your energy and attention on your depressed child. Meanwhile, you may be neglecting your own needs and the needs of other family members. While helping your depressed child should be a top priority, it's important to keep your whole family strong and healthy during this difficult time.

- **Take care of yourself** – In order to help a depressed teen, you need to stay healthy and positive yourself, so don't ignore your own needs. The stress of the situation can affect your own moods and emotions, so cultivate your wellbeing by eating right, getting enough sleep and making time for things you enjoy.
- **Reach out for support** – Get the emotional support you need. Reach out to friends, join a support group, or see a therapist

of your own. It's okay to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, helpless or angry. The important thing is to talk about how your teen's depression is affecting you rather than bottling up your emotions.

- **Be open with the family** – Don't tiptoe around the issue of teen depression in an attempt to "protect" the other children. Kids know when something is wrong. When left in the dark, their imaginations will often jump to far worse conclusions. Be open about what is going on and invite your children to ask questions and share their feelings.
- **Remember the siblings** – Depression in one child can cause stress or anxiety in other family members, so make sure "healthy" children are not ignored. Siblings may need special individual attention or professional help of their own to handle their feelings about the situation.
- **Avoid the blame game** – It can be easy to blame yourself or another family member for your teen's depression, but it only adds to an already stressful situation. Furthermore, depression is normally caused by a number of factors, so it's unlikely—except in the case of abuse or neglect—that any loved one is "responsible."

TEENAGERS AND SUICIDE

Seriously depressed teens often think about, speak of, or make "attention-getting" attempts at suicide. But an alarming and increasing number of teenage suicide attempts are successful, so suicidal thoughts or behaviours should always be taken very seriously.

For the overwhelming majority of suicidal teens, depression or another psychological disorder plays a primary role. In depressed teens who also abuse alcohol or drugs, the risk of suicide is even greater. Because of the very real danger of suicide, teenagers who are depressed should be watched closely for any signs of suicidal thoughts or behaviour.

If you suspect that a teenager you know is suicidal, take immediate action! For 24-hour suicide prevention and support call:

NATIONAL HELPLINES

Lifeline – 0800 543 354 or (09) 5222 999 within Auckland

Suicide Crisis Helpline – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)

Healthline – 0800 611 116

Samaritans – 0800 726 666 (for callers from the Lower North Island, Christchurch and West Coast) or 0800 211 211 or (04) 473 9739 for callers from all other regions

HELPLINES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Youthline – 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email talk@youthline.co.nz thelowdown.co.nz – or email team@thelowdown.co.nz or free text 5626 (emails and text messages will be



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DEPRESSION IN MEN

WHY IT'S HARD TO RECOGNISE AND WHAT HELPS

As men, we often believe we have to be strong and in control of our emotions at all times. When we feel hopeless, helpless, or overwhelmed by despair we tend to deny it or cover it up by drinking too much, behaving recklessly or exploding with anger. But depression in men is a common condition. The first step to recovery is to understand there's no reason to feel ashamed. Then you can face the challenge head-on and start working to feel better.

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION IN MEN

Depression is not a sign of emotional weakness or failing of masculinity. It is a treatable health condition that affects millions of men of all ages and backgrounds, as well as those who care about them—spouses, partners, friends and family. It can also lead to heart disease and other serious medical problems. Of course, it's normal for anyone to feel down from time to time—dips in mood are an ordinary reaction to losses, setbacks and disappointments in life. However, if intense feelings of despair and hopelessness take hold of you and interfere with work, family, and your ability to enjoy life, you may be suffering from depression.

Unfortunately, depression in men can often be overlooked as many of us find it difficult to talk about our feelings. Instead, we tend to focus on the physical symptoms that often accompany depression, such as back pain, headaches, difficulty sleeping or sexual problems. This can result in the underlying depression going untreated, which can have serious consequences. In fact, men suffering from depression are four times more likely to commit suicide than women. It's important for any man to seek help with depression before feelings of despair become feelings of suicide. You need to talk honestly with a friend, loved one, or doctor about what's going on in your mind as well as your body. Once correctly diagnosed, there is plenty you can do to successfully treat and manage depression.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION IN MEN

Men can experience depression in different ways to women. You may develop the standard symptoms of depression and become sad and withdrawn, losing interest in friends and activities you used to enjoy. Or you may become irritable and aggressive, compulsively working, drinking more than normal and engaging in high-risk activities.

Unfortunately, men are far less adept at recognising their symptoms than women. A man is more likely to deny his feelings, hide them from himself and others or try to mask them with other behaviours. The three most common signs of depression in men are:

- **Physical pain.** Sometimes depression in men shows up as physical symptoms—such as backache, frequent headaches, sleep problems, sexual dysfunction, or digestive disorders—that don't respond to normal treatment.
- **Anger.** This could range from irritability, sensitivity to criticism, or a loss of your sense of humour to road rage, a short temper or even violence. Some men become abusive, controlling, verbally or physically abusive to wives, children or other loved ones.
- **Reckless behaviour.** A man suffering from depression may start exhibiting escapist or risky behaviour. This could mean pursuing dangerous sports, driving recklessly or engaging in unsafe sex. You might drink too much, abuse drugs or gamble compulsively.

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TRIGGERS FOR DEPRESSION IN MEN

There's no single cause of depression in men. Biological, psychological, and social factors all play a part, as do lifestyle choices, relationships and coping skills. Stressful life events or anything that makes you feel useless, helpless, alone, profoundly sad or overwhelmed by stress can also trigger depression in men. These could include:

- **Overwhelming stress at work, school, or home**
- **Marital or relationship problems**
- **Not reaching important goals**
- **Losing or changing a job; embarking on military service**
- **Constant money problems**
- **Health problems such as chronic illness, injury, disability**
- **Recently quitting smoking**
- **Death of a loved one**
- **Family responsibilities such as caring for children, spouse, or ageing parents**
- **Retirement; loss of independence.**

TREATING DEPRESSION IN MEN

Don't try to tough out depression on your own. It takes courage to seek help, but most men with depression respond well to treatments such as lifestyle changes, social support, therapy or medication—or a combination of treatments. The first step is to talk to your doctor. Be open about how you're feeling as well as the physical symptoms you're experiencing so your mental health specialist can make an accurate diagnosis. They may be able to refer you to funded counselling through their primary mental health programme, so always ask if that is available.

- **Therapy.** You may feel that talking to a stranger about your problems is "unmanly", or that therapy carries with it a victim status. However, if therapy is available to you, it can be an extremely effective treatment for depression in men. Opening up to a therapist can often bring a swift sense of relief, even to the most sceptical male. If therapy isn't available to you, open up to a friend, family member, or work colleague. The simple act of talking to someone face to face can be an enormous help.
- **Medication.** Antidepressant medication may help relieve some symptoms of depression, but doesn't cure the underlying problem, and is rarely a long-term solution. Medication also comes with side-effects. Don't rely on a doctor who is not trained in mental health for guidance on medication, and always pursue healthy lifestyle changes and social support as well.
- **Eat well.** Eating small, well-balanced meals throughout the day will help you keep your energy up and minimise mood swings. While you may be drawn to sugary foods for the quick boost they provide, complex carbohydrates are a better choice. They'll get you going without the sugar crash. Deficiencies in B vitamins can trigger depression so take a B-complex vitamin supplement or eat more citrus fruit, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs. Foods rich in certain omega-3 fats—such as salmon, walnuts, soya beans, and flaxseed—can also give your mood a boost.
- **Get enough sleep.** When you don't get enough sleep, your depression symptoms can be worse. Sleep deprivation exacerbates anger, irritability and moodiness. Aim for somewhere between seven to nine hours of sleep each night.
- **Reduce stress.** Make changes in your life to help manage and reduce stress. Too much stress exacerbates depression and puts you at risk for future depression. Set realistic goals and break them down into manageable tasks rather than burden yourself with huge objectives all at once. Figure out the things in your life that stress you out, such as work overload or unsupportive relationships, and make a plan to avoid them or minimise their impact.
- **Challenge negative thoughts.** Make a note of every negative thought you have and what triggered it. For each negative, write down something positive. For example, "My boss hates me. He gave me this difficult report to complete" could be replaced with, "My boss must have a lot of faith in me to give me so much responsibility."
- **Postpone making important decisions.** If possible, avoid making life-changing decisions before your depressed mood has lifted. It's hard for a man to be objective when suffering from depression. Discuss potential changes with someone whose opinion you trust before changing careers, moving home, or getting divorced, for example.
- **Don't expect your mood to improve instantly.** Feeling better takes time. You'll likely begin to feel a little better each day. Many men recovering from depression notice improvements in sleep patterns and appetite before improvements in mood.



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EXERCISE AS AN ANTIDEPRESSANT FOR MEN

Exercise can treat mild to moderate depression as effectively as antidepressant medication. Check with your doctor before starting a new exercise programme, then follow these exercise tips:

- **Exercise regularly and often.** A ten-minute walk can improve your mood for two hours. The key to sustaining mood benefits is to exercise regularly. That may mean exercising vigorously for 30 minutes once a day as well as taking one or two short walks to keep your mood elevated throughout the whole day.
- **Find activities that are at least moderately intense.** Aerobic exercise undoubtedly has mental health benefits, but you don't always have to sweat strenuously to see results. Remember, even a few minutes of gentle activity are better than none at all.
- **Choose exercises that are continuous and rhythmic.** Walking, swimming, running, biking, rowing, and yoga are all good choices.
- **Add a mind-body element to increase relaxation.** If walking or running, for example, focus on each step—the sensation of your feet touching the ground, the rhythm of your breath, and the feeling of the wind against your face. If resistance-training, focus on coordinating your breathing with your movements and note how your body feels as you raise and lower the weights.
- **Make exercise social.** Joining a class or exercising in a group can help keep you motivated and make exercise an enjoyable social activity. Try joining a running club or taking stationary bike classes at a gym or YMCA. If you like healthy competition, seek out tennis partners, join a soccer league, volleyball team, or pick-up basketball game. Or find a workout buddy, and afterwards have a drink or watch a game together.

HELPING A MALE RELATIVE OR LOVED ONE WITH DEPRESSION

It often takes a wife, partner, or other family member to recognise a man's symptoms of depression. Even if a man suspects he's depressed, he may be ashamed that he's unable to cope on his own and may only seek help when pressured to do so by a loved one.

TALKING TO A MAN ABOUT DEPRESSION

The first step is to let him know that depression is common among men and is no way a negative reflection on his manhood. Many men don't exhibit typical depressive symptoms—but rather anger and reckless behaviour—so you may want to avoid using the word "depression" and try describing his behaviour as "stressed" or "overly tired." It could help him to open up.

- **Point out how his behaviour has changed, without being critical.** For example, "You always seem to get stomach pains before work," or "You haven't played squash for months."
- **Suggest a general check-up with a physician.** He may be less resistant to seeing a family doctor than a mental health professional at first. A regular doctor can rule out medical causes of depression and then make a referral to someone trained in mental health for therapy or medication. Sometimes, this "professional" opinion makes all the difference for a man.
- **Offer to help him find a mental health provider and go with him on the first visit.** Some men are resistant to talking to a stranger about their feelings, so try to remove roadblocks to him seeking help.
- **Encourage him to make a list of symptoms to discuss.** Help him focus on his feelings as well as physical ailments, and to be honest about his use of alcohol and drugs.

HOW TO OFFER SUPPORT TO A MAN WITH DEPRESSION

Supporting a man with depression requires understanding, patience, affection, and encouragement.

- **Engage him in conversation and listen carefully.** Do not disparage the feelings he expresses, but do point out realities and offer hope.
- **Do not ignore remarks about suicide.** If you are worried about a friend don't hesitate to call Lifeline and ask for help on 0800 543 354
- **Invite him for walks, outings, to the movies, and other activities.** Be gently insistent if your invitation is refused.
- **Encourage participation in activities that once gave**

pleasure, such as hobbies, sports, or cultural activities, but do not push him to undertake too much too soon. He needs diversion and company, but too many demands can increase his feelings of failure.

- **Do not accuse him of faking his feelings, or expect him to "snap out of it".** Instead, keep reassuring him that, with time and help, he will feel better.
- **You may need to monitor whether he is taking prescribed medication or attending therapy sessions.** Encourage him to follow orders about the use of alcohol if he is prescribed antidepressants.
- **Remember, you can't "fix" someone else's depression.** You're not to blame for your loved one's depression or responsible for his happiness. Ultimately, recovery is in his hands.

NATIONAL HELPLINES

Lifeline – 0800 543 354 or (09) 5222 999 within Auckland

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Healthline – 0800 611 116

Samaritans – 0800 726 666 (for callers from the Lower North Island, Christchurch and West Coast) or 0800 211 211 or (04) 473 9739 for callers from all other regions

Adapted from National Institute of Mental Health Credit: www.helpguide.org



The Key To Life Charitable Trust

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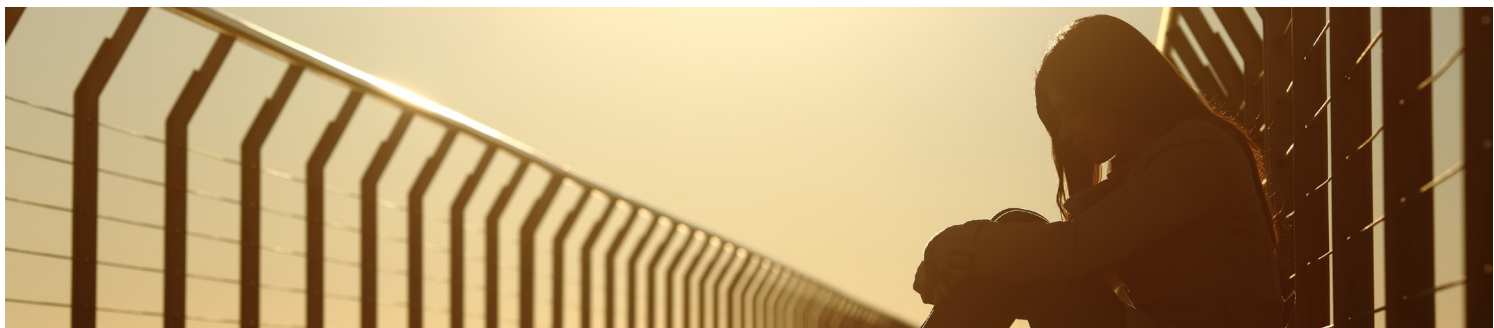
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DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

CAUSES, SYMPTOMS, TREATMENT AND SELF-HELP



Depression is not “one size fits all”, particularly when it comes to the genders. Not only are women more prone to depression than men, but the causes of female depression and even the pattern of symptoms are often different. Many factors contribute to the unique picture of depression in women—from reproductive hormones to social pressures to the female response to stress. Learning about these factors can help you minimise your risk of depression and treat it more effectively.

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

Depression is a serious condition that can impact every area of your life. It can affect your social life, relationships, career, and sense of self-worth and purpose. And for women in particular, depression is common. In fact, according to the National Mental Health Association, about one in every eight women will develop depression at some point during her lifetime.

If you’re feeling sad, guilty, tired, and just generally “down in the dumps”, you may be suffering from major depression. But the good news is that depression is treatable, and the more you understand about depression’s particular implications for and impact on women, the more equipped you will be to tackle the condition head-on.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

The symptoms of depression in women are the same as those for major depression. Common complaints include:

- *Depressed mood*
- *Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy*
- *Feelings of guilt, hopelessness and worthlessness*
- *Suicidal thoughts or recurrent thoughts of death*
- *Sleep disturbance (sleeping more or sleeping less)*
- *Appetite and weight changes*
- *Difficulty concentrating*
- *Lack of energy and fatigue.*

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE DEPRESSION

Although some of the signs and symptoms of depression are the same for both men and women, women tend to experience certain symptoms more often than men. For example, seasonal affective disorder—depression in the winter months due to lower levels of sunlight—is more common in women. Also, women are more likely to experience the symptoms of atypical depression. In atypical depression, rather than sleeping less, eating less, and losing weight, the opposite is seen: sleeping excessively, eating more (especially carbohydrates), and gaining weight. Feelings of guilt associated with depression are also more prevalent and pronounced in women.

Women also have a higher incidence of thyroid problems. Since hypothyroidism can cause depression, this medical problem should always be ruled out by your GP.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE DEPRESSION	
WOMEN TEND TO:	MEN TEND TO:
BLAME THEMSELVES	BLAME OTHERS
FEEL SAD, APATHETIC AND WORTHLESS	FEEL ANGRY, IRRITABLE AND EGO-INFLATED
FEEL ANXIOUS AND SCARED	FEEL SUSPICIOUS AND GUARDED
AVOID CONFLICTS AT ALL COSTS	CREATE CONFLICTS
FEEL SLOWED-DOWN AND NERVOUS	FEEL RESTLESS AND AGITATED
HAVE TROUBLE SETTING BOUNDARIES	NEED TO FEEL IN CONTROL AT ALL COSTS
FIND IT EASY TO TALK ABOUT SELF-DOUBT AND DESPAIR	FIND IT “WEAK” TO ADMIT SELF-DOUBT OR DESPAIR
USE FOOD, FRIENDS AND “LOVE” TO SELF-MEDICATE	USE ALCOHOL, TV, SPORTS AND SEX TO SELF-MEDICATE

Adapted from: *Male Menopause* by Jed Diamond

CAUSES OF DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

Women are about twice as likely as men to suffer from depression. This two-to-one difference persists across racial, ethnic, and economic divides. In fact, this gender difference in rates of depression is found in most countries around the world. There are a number of theories that attempt to explain the higher incidence of depression in women. Many factors have been implicated, including biological, psychological, and social factors.

BIOLOGICAL AND HORMONAL CAUSES OF DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

- **Premenstrual problems** – Hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle can cause the familiar symptoms of premenstrual syndrome (PMS), such as bloating, irritability, fatigue and emotional reactivity. For many women, PMS is mild. But for some women, symptoms are severe enough to disrupt their lives and a diagnosis of premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) is made.
- **Pregnancy and infertility** – The many hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy can contribute to depression, particularly in women already at high risk. Other issues relating to pregnancy such as miscarriage, unwanted pregnancy and infertility can also play a role in depression.
- **Postpartum depression** – Many new mothers experience the “baby blues”. This is a normal reaction that tends to subside within a few weeks. However, some women experience severe, lasting depression. This condition is known as postpartum depression. Postpartum depression is believed to be influenced, at least in part, by hormonal fluctuations.
- **Perimenopause and menopause** – Women may be at increased risk for depression during perimenopause, the stage leading to menopause when reproductive hormones rapidly fluctuate. Women with past histories of depression are at an increased risk of depression during menopause as well.
- **Health problems** – Chronic illness, injury, or disability can lead to depression in women, as can crash-dieting or quitting smoking.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CAUSES OF DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

- **Focusing on and rehashing negative feelings** – Women are more likely to ruminate when they are depressed. This includes crying to relieve emotional tension, trying to figure out why you’re depressed, and talking to your friends about your depression. However, rumination has been found to maintain depression and even make it worse. Men, on the other hand, tend to distract themselves when they are depressed. Unlike rumination, distraction can reduce depression.
- **Overwhelming stress at work, school, or home** – Some studies show that women are more likely than men to develop depression from stress. Furthermore, the female physiological response to stress is different. Women produce more stress hormones than men do, and the female sex hormone progesterone prevents the stress hormone system from turning itself off as it does in men.
- **Body image issues** – The gender difference in depression begins in adolescence. The emergence of sex differences during puberty likely plays a role. Some researchers point to body dissatisfaction, which increases in girls during the sexual development of puberty.



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SOCIAL CAUSES OF DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

As with men, social factors can also play a part in causing depression in women, along with lifestyle choices, relationships and coping skills. These may include:

- *Marital or relationship problems; balancing the pressures of career and home life*
- *Family responsibilities such as caring for children, spouse, or ageing parents*
- *Experiencing discrimination at work or not reaching important goals, losing or changing a job, retirement, or embarking on military service*
- *Persistent money problems*
- *Death of a loved one or other stressful life event that leaves you feeling useless, helpless, alone or profoundly sad.*

TREATING DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

For the most part, women suffering from depression receive the same types of treatment as everyone else. The main treatment approaches are psychotherapy and antidepressant therapy. However, there are some special treatment considerations for depression in women. Your GP may be able to refer you to funded counselling through their primary mental health programme, so always ask if that is available.

DEPRESSION, HORMONES, AND THE REPRODUCTIVE CYCLE

Hormone fluctuations related to the reproductive cycle can have a profound influence on a woman's mood. In light of this possibility, you and your doctor should always look for connections between your depressive symptoms and the female reproductive cycle.

- *Is your depression connected to your menstrual period and a possible effect of PMS?*
- *Are you pregnant and struggling with complications and concerns related to the vast changes you and your body are undergoing?*
- *Are you struggling with the baby blues after recently giving birth?*
- *Or are you approaching menopause and dealing with hormonal and emotional fluctuations?*

All of these milestones in the reproductive cycle can influence or trigger depression. It's also important to consider mood-related side effects from birth control medication or hormone replacement therapy.

HOW DEPRESSION TREATMENT IS DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN

Specific aspects of treatment must often be modified for women. Because of female biological differences, women should generally be started on lower doses of antidepressants than men. Women are also more likely to experience side-

effects, so any medication use should be closely monitored.

Finally, women are more likely than men to require simultaneous treatment for other conditions such as anxiety disorders and eating disorders.

SELF-HELP FOR DEPRESSION IN WOMEN

You can make a huge dent in your depression with simple lifestyle changes: exercising every day, avoiding the urge to isolate yourself, eating healthy food instead of the junk you crave, and carving out time for rest and relaxation.

Feeling better takes time, but you can get there if you make positive choices for yourself each day and draw on the support of others.

- *Talk about your feelings to someone you trust, face to face.*

Share what you're going through with the people you love and trust. Ask for the help and support you need. You may have retreated from your most treasured relationships, but they can get you through this tough time. If you don't feel that you have anyone to confide in, look to build new friendships. Start by joining a support group for depression.

- *Try to keep up with social activities even if you don't feel like it.*

When you're depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell. But being around other people will make you feel less depressed.

- *Get up and moving.* Studies show that regular exercise can be as effective as antidepressant medication for increasing energy levels and decreasing feelings of fatigue. You don't have to hit the gym: a 30-minute walk each day will give you a much-needed boost.
- *Aim for 8 hours of sleep.* Depression typically involves sleep problems. Whether you're sleeping too little or too much, your mood suffers. Get on a better sleep schedule by learning healthy sleep habits.
- *Expose yourself to a little sunlight every day.* Sunlight can help boost your mood. Take a short walk outdoors, have your coffee outside, enjoy an al fresco meal, people-watch on a park bench or sit out in the garden. Aim for at least 15 minutes of sunlight a day.
- *Practice relaxation techniques.* A daily relaxation practice can help relieve symptoms of depression, reduce stress, and boost feelings of joy and wellbeing. Try yoga, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation or meditation.

PREMENSTRUAL DYSPHORIC DISORDER

Most women are all too familiar with premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Unwelcome symptoms of PMS such as bloating, moodiness, and fatigue appear and reappear each month at the same time in the menstrual cycle. For most women, these premenstrual symptoms are uncomfortable but not disabling. But for up to one in ten women symptoms are so distressing and disabling that they warrant a diagnosis of premenstrual

dysphoric disorder (PMDD). PMDD is characterized by severe depression, irritability and other mood disturbances. Symptoms begin about ten to 14 days before your period and improve within a few days of its start.

SYMPTOMS OF PREMENSTRUAL DYSPHORIC DISORDER

- *Feelings of sadness or hopelessness*
- *Feelings of tension or anxiety*
- *Panic attacks*
- *Mood swings and tearfulness*
- *Persistent irritability or anger*
- *Disinterest in daily activities and relationships*
- *Trouble concentrating*
- *Fatigue or low energy*
- *Food cravings or binge-eating*
- *Sleep disturbances*
- *Feeling out of control*
- *Physical symptoms (bloating, breast tenderness, headaches, muscle pain)*

SELF-HELP FOR PMDD

There are many steps you can take to improve PMDD symptoms. Many involve simple lifestyle adjustments:

- *Exercise* – Regular aerobic exercise can reduce the symptoms of PMDD.
- *Dietary modifications* – Changes to your diet may help reduce symptoms. Cutting back on salt, fatty foods, caffeine, and alcohol is recommended. Eating plenty of complex carbohydrates is also recommended.
- *Nutritional supplements* – Vitamin B6, calcium, magnesium, Vitamin E, and tryptophan have all been shown to benefit women suffering from PMDD.
- *Herbal remedies* – Evening primrose oil and chaste tree berry are herbal supplements that have both been studied and found to be effective in the treatment of PMDD.
- *Stress reduction* – Relaxation techniques and other strategies to reduce stress may help with PMDD symptoms. Yoga and meditation are particularly effective.

NATIONAL HELPLINES

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Healthline – 0800 611 116

Samaritans – 0800 726 666 (for callers from the Lower North Island, Christchurch and West Coast) or 0800 211 211 or (04) 473 9739 for callers from all other regions

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