

Coping with depression when you're young

- We all feel low at times in our life. We can feel like no-one understands us, that others are putting too much pressure on us or that our friends are more popular or better than us. Depression can be a very physical experience with extreme fatigue in body and mind. It's natural to feel bad sometimes, but when we feel like this for weeks at a time with no break, it's possible that we may have a bout of depression and we need to get help with it.
- Depression is a really common condition that affects up to 10% of teenagers at any one time. It affects how we feel about ourselves and others, makes us feel tired all the time, causes us to lose interest in hobbies, school and friendships, and it makes us want to hide away from the world.
- Although depression can be hard to deal with and we can feel scared, it's important to remember that there are many ways that we can help ourselves and many supports that we can access to help us get through it.
- Talking to your parents is important. You may think that they can't possibly understand but it is vital that you give them the opportunity to help. Finding the words to describe what you're feeling can be hard, but it's really important to try.
- As with any health problem, it's important to see a GP to find out exactly what's going on. Some physical health issues can cause similar symptoms to depression and no matter what the cause is, help is available. Hormonal changes that we go through in adolescence can have an impact on mood too, so checking in with someone who knows about these things can give us a lot of reassurance.
- Exercise and spending time outdoors is important to help lift our mood and reduce stress and anxiety. It can be difficult to find the motivation to exercise so try to build it into your everyday routine – can you walk to school? Take a brisk stroll around the block at lunchtime? The more you practice the more it will become part of your routine and it will make you feel better.
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet. Sugary foods lead to a sharp drop in blood sugar later and this leads to energy and mood slumps. Caffeine causes increased heart rate and interferes with sleep; remember fizzy drinks like coke contain caffeine too.
- Alcohol is a depressant and can prove a potent trigger to low mood, especially in individuals prone to depression. The human brain is still developing until the age of 25 so street drugs like cannabis can have a devastating impact on mental health as well.
- Many people find writing useful and it can have therapeutic benefits. Don't worry if you don't consider yourself a writer: simply writing a few sentences at the end of each day can help to relieve some concerns, and looking back over things you have written previously can show how far you have come. No one need ever read what you have written.
- Above all, do not try to deal with depression on your own. Reach out to family and friends, and where help and support is offered, take it. You are not alone.

Depression: How to recognise it and what to do

What causes it?

Depression has a number of possible causes. For some people, it comes about as a result of a traumatic life event such as bereavement, relationship breakdown or financial difficulties. In other situations, the person may have an inherent tendency towards depression.

Genetic factors can be key in the case of bipolar disorder, another type of mood disorder which involves periods of depression as well as periods of elation, where the mood is significantly higher than normal and the person may have excessive energy, little need for sleep and may have grandiose ideas and engage in risk-taking behaviour.

What should I do if I think depression is a factor for me or my loved one?

The most important thing to do is speak to a doctor or mental health professional in order to get a correct diagnosis. There are a number of treatments for depression, depending on the cause and severity of symptoms and a professional is best placed to decide which, if any, treatment is most appropriate.

Aware provides information leaflets on depression as well as booklets on specific topics such as Bipolar Disorder, Depression in Later Life and Postnatal Depression. A booklet entitled Keeping Hope Alive, written specifically for family members is also available. Support services include a loCall Helpline open 365 days a year on 1890 303 302 (the helpline can be accessed from outside Ireland on +353 1 676 6166), as well as support groups for both individuals who experience depression and also for family members.

Depression is a very common condition which affects more than one person in ten at any one time. Any one of us, irrespective of age, gender or background can be affected.

It is possible to come through depression, and early recognition and ongoing support are key to a positive outcome.

Depression: What is it?

Depression is a mental health condition which affects thinking, energy, feelings and behaviour. It can vary from mild to severe and can prove disabling in some cases, impacting on the individuals family and work life. It is possible to minimise the impact of depression by accessing information and support, and finding ways to manage the condition.

How does it affect me?

Depression has eight main symptoms, and the advice is to speak to a GP or mental health professional if you notice five or more of these symptoms, lasting for a period of two weeks or more. The symptoms are:

- Feeling - sad, anxious or bored
- Energy - low energy, feeling tired or fatigued
- Sleep - under or over sleeping, frequent waking during the night
- Thinking - poor concentration
- Interest - loss of interest in hobbies, family or social life
- Value - low self esteem
- Aches - physical aches and pains with no physical basis
e.g. chest/head/tummy pain associated with anxiety or stress
- Life - loss of interest in living, thinking about death, suicidal thoughts