



Depression is a common condition. About one in six people will experience depression during their lifetime. It can affect anyone: men and women, young and old. Although more women than men seek treatment for depression, this does not necessarily mean that men are less likely to get depressed. It could mean they are more reluctant to seek help.

Sometimes there is a trigger for depression. Life-changing events, such as bereavement, having a baby or losing your job, can all cause depression. But you can also become depressed for no obvious reason.

## WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FEELING LOW AND DEPRESSION?

Feeling low or down is something we all experience from time to time. It's a common response to sad or difficult events and situations. Depression is when these feelings are persistent or so strong that they prevent you from doing the things you would normally do.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

Symptoms of depression include lasting feelings of sadness, losing interest in the things you used to enjoy, feeling constantly tired, having difficulty getting to sleep, loss of appetite and feeling life is not worth living.

***It has long been known that regular exercise is good for our physical health. It can reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke.***

In recent years, studies have shown that regular physical activity also has positive benefits for mental health. Exercise can help people recover from depression and prevent them from becoming depressed in the first place.

Exercise can improve mood, reduce anxiety, and improve concentration. Exercise influences certain chemicals in the brain that affect our mood and make us

feel happier.

Exercise can also boost people's self-confidence and self-esteem. Dr Alan Cohen, a GP with a special interest in mental health, says that when people get depressed or anxious, they often feel they're not in control of their lives.

***Eating healthily can give you more energy and improve your general wellbeing. Find out how a balanced diet can help you cope with depression.***

Feeling down or depressed can affect both your appetite and your daily routine. Some people don't feel like eating when they're depressed and are at risk of becoming underweight. Others find comfort in food and can put on excess weight. Anti-depressants can also affect your appetite.

Research into the links between diet and depression is still underway. Currently, there is not enough evidence to say for certain that some foods help to relieve depressive symptoms. However, eating regularly and having a balanced diet improves your general health, which is closely related to your mental wellbeing.

There are many simple steps you can take to improve your diet. The healthy eating advice below is particularly relevant for people with mild to moderate depression. If you're more severely depressed you may not feel able to shop or cook. If this is the case, see your GP to discuss the types of treatment and support that are available.

1. Eat regular meals. Be sure to have three meals every day. If you feel hungry between meals have a healthy snack such as a piece of fruit.
2. Eat more wholegrain cereals, fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds as these foods are rich in vitamins and minerals. Try to eat at least five portions of different fruit and vegetables every day.
3. Try to include some protein at every meal. Protein is essential for the growth and repair of the body and you can get it from meat, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, lentils, and beans. Some recent studies suggest that one of the elements of protein, called tryptophan, can improve the mood of people with depression, although it is too early for any firm conclusions to be made.

# Depression

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4. Drink enough fluid: six to eight glasses of fluid a day. Even mild dehydration can affect our mood. Symptoms of dehydration include increased irritability and loss of concentration. Drinks that contain caffeine, such as coffee, cola, teas, and some energy drinks may have a dehydrating effect, so drink other fluids as well, such as water, herbal teas, and juices.
5. If you drink alcohol, keep within safe limits. Alcohol has a dehydrating effect and can make you more depressed. If you're a man don't regularly drink more than three to four units a day. If you're a woman don't regularly drink more than two to three units a day. Don't drink alcohol if you're taking antidepressants.