

# Depression –

## Just sad or depressed?

Everyone is familiar with periods of sadness and feeling down. They are as much a part of life as periods of real happiness. However, it is not always easy to recognise when these feelings turn into the illness *depression*.

This information leaflet explains symptoms that may be indicative of depression and treatment options available for adults.

### What are the symptoms of depression?

Certain symptoms are an indication of depression and not just fleeting feelings of the «blues». The three main symptoms are:

- a low, depressed mood that lasts most of the day and occurs almost every day
- little interest and pleasure in meaningful activities, for instance hobbies, that used to be fun
- decreased drive or tiring easily

If two of these three symptoms persist for more than two weeks, this may point to depression.

In addition, other symptoms may appear:

- difficulty paying attention, concentrating or making decisions
- decreased self-worth and self-confidence
- self-criticism and feelings of guilt
- slow movements and speech or inner disquiet, for instance not being able to sit still
- problems going to sleep, waking up very early
- reduced appetite, weight loss or a strong urge to eat a lot
- suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts

Depending on the number of symptoms, experts distinguish between three degrees of severity of depression: mild, moderate and severe. When determining the degree, the severity of the symptoms and how much they restrict you also play a role.

Physical symptoms may also be an expression of depression, for instance gastrointestinal complaints, pain, dizziness or breathlessness.

### The two-question test

Initial clues of depression can be provided by a simple test: the *two-question test*.

- Over the past month have you felt down, sad, low or despondent?
- Over the past month have you experienced far less pleasure and joy when doing things you usually like?



If your answer to both these questions is “yes”, you should seek help. You should go to a medical or psychotherapeutic practice.

### How is depression diagnosed?

The examination begins with a consultation. Your doctor or psychotherapist will want to hear more about your symptoms, your life situation, possible concomitant disorders and any medications you are on. It is also important how long you have had the symptoms and when they first appeared. A frank exchange is crucial to establishing whether you have depression and, if so, how severe it is. You may also be asked to complete a questionnaire.

Other mental or physical illnesses may also cause symptoms similar to depression. Therefore, further questions and physical examinations may be added to rule out other illnesses.

### At a glance



- Depression is very common. Around 16 to 20 out of every 100 people will develop this illness in the course of their lives. Women are affected about twice as often as men.
- This illness has many faces. The symptoms include a depressed mood, loss of interest and lack of drive.
- Doctors and psychotherapists can diagnose depression. The most important tool for this is a consultation.
- The basis of any treatment is “helping you help yourself” so that you can cope better with this illness. Other treatment options include online programmes, psychotherapy and antidepressants.
- The treatment recommended for you personally will depend on how many symptoms you have, how severe they are and how much they restrict you. Together with your doctor or psychotherapist, you will decide which treatment is best for you.

## Can depression go away by itself?

Even without treatment, depression may go away after some time. If depression is left untreated, it may last longer or recur more frequently.

## What are the treatment options?

There are several options that are known to alleviate the symptoms of depression:

- simple “self-help” aids, such as books, training courses or counselling sessions
- online programs or apps for depression. It is important that it is your doctor or psychotherapist who prescribes them and monitors you during your treatment.
- psychotherapy
- medication for depression (antidepressants)
- complementary measures, such as exercise or sports therapy, light therapy, self-help groups for affected persons and their family members or occupational therapy

The right treatment for you depends on the severity of your depression. The course of the illness, your life circumstances and possible side effects of the treatment also influence this decision. It is, therefore, advisable that you discuss this with your psychotherapist or doctor.

Experts recommend the following:

- **Mild depression:** If you have mild depression, simple measures may be enough, such as counselling sessions, information from books or online programs. Sometimes psychotherapy may also be advisable. Treatment with antidepressants should *not* be the first step, but may be considered in certain situations.
- **Moderate depression:** In addition to self-help measures, experts recommend *either* psychotherapy *or* antidepressants. Both can very likely help equally well. In addition, your doctor or psychotherapist may suggest an online programme or app.
- **Severe depression:** Antidepressants *and* psychotherapy in parallel are the most effective option here. This combination is, therefore, recommended for severe depression. In addition, online programmes can support the combination treatment.  
It may take some time for the treatment to take effect. In some cases, psychotherapy or antidepressants may not help. In this case, it is important to determine the causes and, if necessary, adjust the treatment.

## What can you do for yourself?

- It may help to take someone you trust along with you to the consultation. That person can support you and describe your mood “from the outside perspective”.
- Sports and physical exercise are an important component of treatment. Try setting yourself small achievable goals: a walk or a short ride on your bike. Pick something you enjoy doing.
- If you have depression, it can be hard to go to work. If this is the case, you can ask your doctor to go on sick leave. But sometimes it is better to go to work, for example, to maintain a daily routine. You can weigh the pros and cons with your doctor or psychotherapist.
- Other little things can help, too: a phone call to a trusted person, meeting up with someone, a trip to the hairdresser or a home-cooked meal can constitute small successes.
- With support, crises are easier to overcome. Accept offers for a chat and assistance from your family and friends.
- You may find it helpful to talk to other people with depression. If this is the case, you could also join a self-help group.
- Information can help you to better manage the illness. Find out more about treatments and counselling options at: [www.patienten-information.de/uebersicht/depression](http://www.patienten-information.de/uebersicht/depression).

## More information



### I. Sources, methodology and links

This information is based on the latest scientific findings from the National Disease Management Guideline on Unipolar Depression. The Programme for National Treatment Guidelines is funded by the German Medical Association (BÄK), the Association of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians (KBV) and Association of the Scientific Medical Societies (AWMF).

#### Methodology and sources:

→ [www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformationen/depression#methodik](http://www.patienten-information.de/kurzinformationen/depression#methodik)

#### Further information on the subject of depression

→ [www.patienten-information.de/uebersicht/depression](http://www.patienten-information.de/uebersicht/depression)

### II. Contact to self-help groups

You can find out from NAKOS (national contact and information office for the encouragement and support of self-help groups) where there is a self-help group in your area:

→ [www.nakos.de](http://www.nakos.de), Tel.: 030 3101 8960



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