

Trauma and Depression

It's normal to feel down or sad sometimes. If you feel that your mood stays low for weeks at a time, keeps coming back, or interferes with life, it could be a sign of depression. Having low mood or depression following a trauma is common. However, not all depression is caused by trauma.

Having depression is more than just feeling sad. People with depression find that they

- lose interest in the things they usually enjoy,
- they may notice that they are sleeping and eating a lot more, or less than they usually would.
- It might be difficult to concentrate or stay focused on things.
- Some people start to feel down on themselves or have feelings of hopelessness.
- In severe cases, people sometimes experience thoughts of harming themselves or of taking their own life.

Most people who live through a trauma have some difficulty coping and adjusting to life in the aftermath. Remember it is a normal response to find it hard to cope with the painful experiences and losses linked to trauma. Unsurprisingly this can impact on your mood. For example, survivors of a disaster may have been injured or lost someone they love, or a home. Survivors of abuse or violence sometimes have difficulty trusting other people because of their experiences and feel alone. It is normal for these experiences to be difficult and impact on your mood.

It is possible that people can have depression and PTSD together. In fact, many signs of PTSD and depression overlap:

- people often struggle with sleep and find it difficult to focus on things.
- People may lose interest and pleasure in things they would usually enjoy.
- They may spend less time with or avoid other people and become more irritable.
- Depression can make people feel worn out, worthless, helpless and sad.
- Sometimes people feel that they will never feel better and can lead to a sense of giving up. Together these symptoms can get in the way of looking for help and treatment. It is important to know that these feelings are part of having depression and they can change when help is sought.

The first approach to improving your mood is usually to try and make lifestyle changes such as taking exercise, regular healthy eating, and getting into a good sleeping routine. These things can have a powerful effect on mood. Some people might need a bit more such as a talking therapy and/or medication. Many respond best with a combination of approaches that might include, lifestyle changes, talking therapies, and medication.

Tips for people struggling with signs of depression

Here are some helpful things that may help to improve how you feel:

- Try and engage in gentle exercise: a 20-30 minute walk a day can make a big difference. Exercise releases chemicals in your body known as endorphins that are a natural anti-depressant.
- Think of a simple and achievable goal to aim for and plan out small manageable steps how to reach it.
- Talking with family and friends, or someone you are able to trust. Talking about how you feel can be helpful and might make it easier to approach a GP or other health worker for help.
- Seek out and spend time with others and get support from them- make an effort to stay connected to people you care about, try not to close yourself off. Keeping in touch can help get perspective and make you feel less alone.
- Try and occupy yourself in activities that might make you feel better: do the things you used to enjoy before you started feeling this way- even if you don't feel like it, try doing a little bit of something. The chances are, you will feel better after you do.
- Avoid alcohol or other substances as a way of getting you through difficult times. Alcohol is a depressant and can have an effect on medication you might be taking. Using alcohol or drugs can seem like they help you feel better temporarily but will make the problem worse in the longer term.
- Remember to be kind to yourself and that depression is not your fault.
- Following a trauma people can think and expect the worst of themselves, their lives and the future. It might be helpful to remember that a thought is not a fact – simply thinking something does not mean that it's true or will happen.
- Try to challenge your thoughts - starting off by noticing them, jotting them down, ask yourself what would you say to a friend if they thought this?
- Keep a diary of the positive achievements of the week, focus your mind on positives rather than negative.

When changes like these are made it takes time for things to take effect, don't be hard on yourself and try things until you find something that works for you.