

How to Spot the Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Knowing what to look out for could one day save your life or the life of someone close to you

BY DANIEL DAVIES (MEN'S HEALTH MAGAZINE)



Men don't get depressed. We pull 'birds', drink beer drunk and get on with it, right? But given that more than 300 million people are affected by clinical depression worldwide, it's safe to say that at least a few of us are struggling.

To be exact, 16.8 per cent of the UK's male population are dealing with depression, and while they're not all going through the same thing, because depression takes many forms and describes many different severities, they are all in need of help.

What the escalating numbers don't tell you though, is there are reasons to be hopeful. For a start, depression is an entirely treatable condition. Spot its signs, consult your GP and there's no need for it, and your life, to spiral out of control.

Men are three times as likely to take their own life than women

To help you do just that, we've put together this guide to spotting the signs and symptoms of depression. We hope we're not overstating the point when we say, it could one day save your life or the life of someone close to you.

What Is Clinical Depression?

Clinical depression is when feelings of unhappiness and hopelessness last for weeks, months and years rather than days. Just how bad it gets can differ from person to person;

mild cases can leave people feeling persistently low, while, at the other end of the spectrum, severe depression can make people feel suicidal.

Sometimes the cause of people's depression is obvious; losing your job, the breakdown of a relationship or a bereavement can all be triggers. If your family has a history of depression then this too can influence the likelihood of you suffering from it.

Clinical depression, however, can't always be traced back to these two causes. It can affect anyone, whether you've gone through a life-changing event, have a family history of the disease or not. Ultimately, it's a condition that doesn't respect status.

Men's reluctance to speak about their mental health or access professional help are thought to be the reason why men are actually less likely than women to be diagnosed with depression.

But men are three times as likely to take their own life than women. There are other signs and symptoms, be they be psychological, physical or societal, that may help identify the signs and symptoms of depression.

Signs of Depression: Psychological

- a persistent low mood or sadness
- feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- low self-esteem
- feeling tearful, guilt-ridden, irritable or intolerant of others
- having little motivation or interest in things
- a difficulty making decisions
- not getting any enjoyment out of life
- feeling anxious or worried
- having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of harming yourself



Physical Signs of Depression

- speaking or moving more cautiously than usual
- changes in appetite as well as weight loss or weight gain
- constipation
- aches and pains with no cause
- a general lack of energy
- low sex drive
- disturbed sleep

Social Signs of Depression

- poor performance at work
- avoiding meeting up with friends and taking part in fewer social activities
- disinterest in usual hobbies and interests
- difficulties in people's home and family life

Other Forms of Depression

The word depression is often used as a catch-all term to describe a number of specific conditions. Depression can also be a symptom of a completely different condition. Here are some of the other ways depression can take hold.

Bipolar Disorder or Manic Depression

People suffering from bipolar disorder experience spells of depression but are also prone to excessively high mood or mania. Mania can cause people to engage in harmful behaviours, such as gambling, going on spending sprees or having unsafe sex.

Seasonal Affective Disorder or SAD

Also known as "winter depression", SAD usually occurs during the cold and dark winter months. People suffering from SAD can experience depression, as well as insomnia, anxiety and weight loss.

Dysthymia or Chronic Depression

Also known persistent depressive disorder (PDD), people are diagnosed with dysthymia if they have been suffering from a fairly consistent low mood for two years or more.



Psychotic Depression

Some people who have severe clinical depression will also experience hallucinations and delusional thinking, which are the symptoms of psychosis.

Treatments for Depression

The treatment a GP recommends for depression will really depend on the severity of the condition. We've broken down the possible treatments, so sufferers can see GP's likely recommendations whether they're suffering from mild, moderate or severe depression.

Treatments for Mild Depression

- Monitoring: A GP may suggest waiting a short time to see if your condition gets better by itself.
- Exercise: Exercise is known to ease depressive thoughts, which is why it's one of the main treatments for mild depression.
- Talking: Talking to a friend or family member may help with mild depression. GPs may also advise you to attend self-help groups in the local area.
- Technology: The NHS provides links to mental health apps and tools in its NHS apps library.
- Lifestyle: Changes such as cutting down on alcohol, giving up smoking and eating healthily, may also improve your depression.

Treatments for Mild to Moderate Depression

- Cognitive behavioural therapy: CBT is a talking therapy where you work with a therapist to identify ways to change the way you think as well as your behaviour if they are leading you toward depressive thoughts.
- Counselling: Another talking therapy, but this time a trained therapist will listen to you and help you identify ways to deal with your emotional issues.

Treatments for Moderate to Severe Depression

- Antidepressants: Tablets prescribed by a doctor that treat the symptoms of depression.
- Combination therapy: When treatments like antidepressants and talking therapies are combined.
- Mental health teams: People with severe depression may be referred to a mental health team made up of psychologists, psychiatrists, specialist nurses and occupational therapists who can provide specialist treatment and medication.

Where to Go for Help

The NHS advises that if you experience symptoms of depression for most of the day, every day, for more than 2 weeks, you should consult your GP.

Did you know that only 1 in 5 people who contact the Samaritans are suicidal, so this is also a resource for people suffering from mild, moderate and severe depression. The Samaritans can be contacted in the UK on 116 123.

If you're looking for further information on any mental health issue, MIND can be contacted on **0300 123 3393**. Lines are open 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.