

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO HAS DEPRESSION



What is depression?

Life can be challenging and it's normal for all of us to feel sad, overwhelmed or down from time to time. However, when we start to experience these feelings more intensely and continuously for more than two weeks it could be a sign of depression.

Depression affects how people feel about themselves and can have a significant impact on their day to day life. Depression is treatable and there is plenty you can do if you're concerned about the wellbeing of someone you know.

Facts about depression

More than 300 million people around the world suffer from depression¹

It is the leading cause of disability worldwide²

At its worse, depression can lead to suicide³

What causes depression?

The exact cause of depression isn't yet known although there are several risk factors associated with its development. Generally, depression does not result from a single event, but from a combination of recent events and other personal factors.

Life events: Ongoing difficulties, such as relationships with high conflict, isolation, and prolonged exposure to stress can make someone more vulnerable to depression.

Personal factors: Some people may be more at risk due to having a family history of depression. They may also have certain personality traits such as excessive worrying, low self-esteem or have a strong need for control.

Brain changes: Factors such as genetic vulnerability, severe life stressors, some medication, drugs, alcohol, and medical conditions can result in issues with mood regulation in the brain.

Signs and symptoms

Depression is a highly individual experience and no two people will experience depression in the same way. Below are some of the signs and symptoms of depression:

Feelings

- Overwhelmed.
- Frustrated.
- Irritable.
- Indecisive.
- Sadness or difficulty feeling joy.
- Lacking in confidence.

Thoughts

- Worthlessness: *"I'm a failure; I'm not good enough"*.
- Helplessness: *"I'm trying but nothing seems to work"*.
- Hopelessness: *"Things will never get better; I can't see any way out of this mess"*.
- Despair: *"Life's not worth living"* or *"People would be better off without me"*.
- Repetitively going over negative events from the past

Physical

- Tired, sick and run down.
- Issues falling asleep or wanting to sleep for long periods of time (struggling to get out of bed).
- Changes in appetite.
- Physical aches and pains.
- Significant weight-loss or gain.

Behaviour

- Cancelling plans or not taking part in usual activities they enjoy.
- Withdrawing from conversations, friends, family or colleagues.
- Relying on stimulants and sedatives to cope with any physical or emotional pain.
- Difficulties with concentration and planning.
- Difficulties with completing tasks at work or home.



How you can help

Support from family, friends and colleagues can make a real difference to someone with depression. Below are some of the steps you can take to help someone on the road to recovery.

- 1 BE AWARE – ASK “ARE YOU OK?”**

Reflect on any changes you have noticed and in a supportive, non-judgemental way let them know of the changes you've seen. For example, you could say “I haven't seen you for a while, and it's not like you to cancel plans at the last minute. What's been going on?”. Or, “I've noticed you've been quiet in the office lately, are you OK?”. Helping someone build self-awareness is the first step in recovery and listening to their story builds your own understanding about how they're feeling.
- 2 LISTEN WITHOUT JUDGEMENT**

Take the person seriously and let them express their feelings without judgement. Acknowledge that things seem difficult for them and encourage them to explain what's going on. “I can see things are really hard for you at the moment ... how are you feeling about that?”. Or, “How long have you felt that way?”. Don't be afraid of silence if they need time to think. It's also important to avoid saying things like “I know how that feels”, “it could be worse” or “look on the bright side” as this can minimise how the person is feeling.
- 3 ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK SUPPORT**

Encourage the person to speak to a mental health professional. This could be their GP or one of our highly skilled clinicians at Benestar. Ask if they know about the Best You program and encourage them to call or visit BeneHub. For example you could say: “I can get the number for you, why don't we call together and make the appointment for you”.

If you are the person's manager, Benestar's MyCoach for People Leaders service is available to help you talk the situation through and to develop a tailored plan for supporting your team member.
- 4 FOLLOW UP**

Following your conversation, make sure to check in with them to see how they're going. If they haven't spoken to anyone yet don't judge them. Instead stay in touch and let them know that you are there for them if they need support.
- 5 TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF**

Supporting someone who is experiencing depression isn't always easy and it can take a toll on our own health and wellbeing. Make sure you're taking time to relax and do the things you enjoy. Try to have a regular sleep routine, exercise and eat well. Lean on your friends and family if you need support. Or talk to the team at Benestar for guidance on how to take care of yourself as well as the person close to you.
- 6 ENCOURAGE ACTIVITY**

Regular physical activity is a good way to help prevent or manage mild depression. You can encourage the person by offering to go on walks together, having walking meetings, or by suggesting that they move away from their desk at lunch time. Research shows that keeping active can:

 - Help lift mood through improved fitness and the release of natural chemicals in the brain.
 - Help improve sleeping patterns.
 - Increase energy levels.
 - Help block negative thoughts and/or distract people from daily worries.
 - Help people feel less alone if they exercise with others.

NEED ASSISTANCE?

If you or someone close to you is experiencing depression contact Benestar for confidential coaching and support.

Visit [Benestar.com](https://www.benestar.com) or call

Sources:

^{1,2,3} World Health Organisation: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression>