

Depression in Men

Depression isn't a sign of weakness and you don't have to tough it out. Instead, try these tips to help you start feeling better today.



What is male depression?

As men, we like to think of ourselves as strong and in control of our emotions. When we feel hopeless or overwhelmed by despair we often deny it or try to cover it up. But depression is a common problem that affects many of us at some point in our lives, not a sign of emotional weakness or a failing of masculinity. It affects millions of men of all ages and backgrounds, as well as those who care about them—spouses, partners, friends, and family. Of course, it's normal for anyone to feel down from time to time—dips in mood are an ordinary reaction to losses, setbacks, and disappointments in life. However, male depression changes how you think, feel, and function in your daily life. It can interfere with your productivity at work or school and impact your relationships, sleep, diet, and overall enjoyment of life. Severe depression can be intense and unrelenting.

Unfortunately, depression in men often gets overlooked as many of us find it difficult to talk about our feelings. Instead, we tend to focus on the physical symptoms that often accompany male depression, such as back pain, headaches, difficulty sleeping, or sexual problems. This can result in the underlying depression going untreated, which can have serious consequences. Men suffering from depression are four times more likely to commit suicide than women, so it's vital for any man to seek help with depression before feelings of despair become feelings of suicide. Talk honestly with a friend, loved one, or doctor about what's going on in your mind as well as your body. Once correctly diagnosed, there is plenty you can do to successfully treat and manage male depression and prevent it from coming back.

Signs and symptoms of depression in men

Men tend to be less adept at recognizing symptoms of depression than women. A man is more likely to deny his feelings, hide them from himself and others, or try to mask them with other behaviors. And while men may experience [classic symptoms of depression](#) such as despondent mood, loss of interest in work or hobbies, weight and sleep disturbances, fatigue, and concentration problems, they are more likely than women to experience "stealth" depression symptoms such as anger, [substance abuse](#), and agitation.

The three most commonly overlooked signs of depression in men are:

1. **Physical pain.** Sometimes depression in men shows up as physical symptoms—such as backache, frequent headaches, sleep problems, sexual dysfunction, or digestive disorders—that don't respond to normal treatment.
2. **Anger.** This could range from irritability, sensitivity to criticism, or a loss of your sense of humor to road rage, a short temper, or even violence. Some men become abusive or controlling.
3. **Reckless behavior.** A man suffering from depression may exhibit escapist or risky behavior such as pursuing dangerous sports, driving recklessly, or engaging in unsafe sex. You might drink too much, abuse drugs, or gamble compulsively.

How to know if you're depressed

If you identify with several of the following, you may be suffering from depression.

1. You feel hopeless and helpless
2. You've lost interest in friends, activities, and things you used to enjoy
3. You're much more irritable, short-tempered, or aggressive than usual

4. You're consuming more alcohol, engaging in reckless behavior, or self-medicating
5. You feel restless and agitated
6. Your sleep and appetite has changed
7. You can't concentrate or your productivity at work has declined
8. You can't control your negative thoughts

If you're feeling suicidal...

Problems don't seem temporary—they seem overwhelming and permanent. But if you reach out for help, you will feel better.

Read HelpGuide's [Suicide Prevention](#) articles or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. For help outside the U.S., visit [Befrienders Worldwide](#).

Triggers for depression in men

There's no single cause of depression in men. Biological, psychological, and social factors all play a part, as do lifestyle choices, relationships, and coping skills.

While any man can suffer from depression, there are some risk factors that make a man more vulnerable, such as:

- Loneliness and lack of social support
- Inability to effectively deal with stress
- A history of alcohol or drug abuse
- Early childhood trauma or abuse
- Aging in isolation, with few social outlets

Depression and erectile dysfunction

Impotence or erectile dysfunction is not only a trigger of depression in men, it can also be a side effect of many antidepressant medications.

Men with sexual function problems are almost twice as likely to be depressed as

those without.

Depression increases the risk of erectile dysfunction.

Many men are reluctant to acknowledge sexual problems, thinking it's a reflection on their manhood rather than a treatable problem caused by depression.

Getting help for male depression

Don't try to tough out depression on your own. It takes courage to seek help—from a loved one or a professional. Most men with depression respond well to self-help steps such as reaching out for social support, exercising, switching to a healthy diet, and making other lifestyle changes.

But don't expect your mood to improve instantly. You'll likely begin to feel a little better each day. Many men recovering from depression notice improvements in sleep patterns and appetite before improvements in their mood. But these self-help steps can have a powerful effect on how you think and feel, helping you to overcome the symptoms of depression and regain your enjoyment of life.

Tip 1: Seek social support

Work commitments can often make it difficult for men to find time to maintain friendships, but the first step to tackling male depression is to find people you can really connect with, face-to-face. That doesn't mean simply trading jokes with a coworker or chatting about sports with the guy sitting next to you in a bar. It means finding someone you feel comfortable sharing your feelings with, someone who'll listen to you without judging you, or telling you how you should think or feel.

You may think that discussing your feelings isn't very macho, but whether you're aware of it or not, you're already communicating your feelings to those around you; you're just not using words. If you're short-tempered, drinking more than usual, or punching holes in the wall, those closest to you will know something's wrong. Choosing to talk about what you're going through, instead, can actually help you feel better.

Finding social support to beat male depression

For many men—especially when you’re suffering from depression—reaching out to others can seem overwhelming. But developing and maintaining close relationships are vital to helping you get through this tough time. If you don’t feel that you have anyone to turn to, it’s never too late to [build new friendships](#) and improve your support network.

How to reach out for depression support

Look for support from people who make you feel safe and cared for. The person you talk to doesn’t have to be able to fix you; they just need to be a good listener—someone who’ll listen attentively and compassionately without being distracted or judging you.

Make face-time a priority. Phone calls, social media, and texting are great ways to stay in touch, but they don’t replace good old-fashioned in-person quality time. The simple act of talking to someone face to face about how you feel can play a big role in relieving depression and keeping it away.

Try to keep up with social activities even if you don’t feel like it. Often when you’re depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell, but being around other people will make you feel less depressed.

Find ways to support others. It’s nice to receive support, but research shows you get an even bigger mood boost from providing support yourself. So find ways—both big and small—to help others: [volunteer](#), be a listening ear for a friend, do something nice for somebody.

Care for a pet. While nothing can replace the human connection, [pets can bring joy and companionship into your life](#) and help you feel less isolated. Caring for a pet can also get you outside of yourself and give you a sense of being needed—both powerful antidotes to depression.

Join a support group for depression. Being with others dealing with depression can go a long way in reducing your sense of isolation. You can also encourage each other, give and receive advice on how to cope, and share your experiences.

Invite someone to a ballgame, movie, or concert. There are plenty of other people who feel just as awkward about reaching out and making friends as you do. Be the one to break the ice.

Call or email an old buddy. Even if you've retreated from relationships that were once important to you, make the effort to reconnect.

Tip 2: Support your health

Positive lifestyle changes can help lift depression and keep it from coming back.

Aim for eight hours of sleep. Depression typically involves sleep problems; whether you're sleeping too little or too much, your mood suffers. Get on a better sleep schedule by learning healthy sleep habits.

Keep stress in check. Not only does stress prolong and worsen depression, but it can also trigger it. Figure out all the things in your life that stress you out, such as work overload, money problems, or unsupportive relationships, and find ways to [relieve the pressure and regain control](#).

Practice relaxation techniques. [A daily relaxation practice](#) can help relieve symptoms of depression, reduce stress, and boost feelings of joy and well-being. Try yoga, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation.

Spend time in sunlight. Getting outside during daylight hours and [exposing yourself to the sun](#) can help boost serotonin levels and improve your mood. Take a walk, have your coffee outside, do some yard work, or double up on the benefits by exercising outdoors. If you live somewhere with little winter sunshine, try using a light therapy box.

Develop a “wellness toolbox” to deal with depression

Come up with a list of things that you can do for a quick mood boost. The more “tools” for coping with depression, the better. Try and implement a few of these ideas each day, even if you're feeling good.

1. Spend some time in nature
2. List what you like about yourself
3. Read a good book
4. Watch a funny movie or TV show
5. Take a long, hot shower
6. Take care of a few small tasks
7. Play with a pet

8. Talk to friends or family face-to-face
9. Listen to music
10. Do something spontaneous

Tip 3: Exercise for greater mental and physical health

When you're depressed, just getting out of bed can seem like a daunting task, let alone working out! But exercise is a powerful depression fighter-and one of the most important tools in your recovery arsenal. Research shows that regular exercise can be as effective as medication for relieving depression symptoms. It also helps prevent relapse once you're well.

To get the most benefit, aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise per day. This doesn't have to be all at once-and it's okay to start small. A 10-minute walk can improve your mood for two hours.

Exercise is something you can do right now to boost your mood

Your fatigue will improve if you stick with it. Starting to exercise can be difficult when you're depressed and feeling exhausted. But research shows that your energy levels will improve if you keep with it. Exercise will help you to feel energized and less fatigued, not more.

Find exercises that are continuous and rhythmic. The most benefits for depression come from rhythmic exercise-such as walking, weight training, swimming, or martial arts-where you move both your arms and legs.

Add a mindfulness element, especially if your depression is rooted in unresolved trauma or fed by obsessive, negative thoughts. Focus on how your body feels as you move-such as the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, or the feeling of the wind on your skin, or the rhythm of your breathing.

Pair up with an exercise partner. Not only does working out with others enable you to spend time socializing, it can also help to keep you motivated. Try joining a running club, seeking out tennis partners, or enrolling in a soccer or volleyball league.

Take a dog for a walk. If don't own a dog, you can volunteer to walk homeless dogs for an animal shelter or rescue group. You'll not only be helping yourself but also be

helping to socialize and exercise the dogs, making them more adoptable.

Tip 4: Eat a healthy diet to improve how you feel

Minimize sugar and refined carbs. You may crave sugary snacks, baked goods, or comfort foods such as pasta or French fries, but these “feel-good” foods quickly lead to [a crash in mood and energy](#).

Reduce your intake of foods that can adversely affect your mood, such as caffeine, alcohol, trans fats, and foods with high levels of chemical preservatives or hormones.

Eat more Omega-3 fatty acids to give your mood a boost. [The best sources](#) are fatty fish (salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines), seaweed, flaxseed, and walnuts.

Try foods rich in mood-enhancing nutrients, such as bananas (magnesium to decrease anxiety, vitamin B6 to promote alertness, tryptophan to boost feel-good serotonin levels) and spinach (magnesium, folate to reduce agitation and improve sleep).

Avoid deficiencies in B vitamins which can trigger depression. Eat more citrus fruit, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs.

Tip 5: Challenge negative thinking

Do you feel like you’re powerless or weak? That bad things happen and there’s not much you can do about it? That your situation is hopeless? Depression puts a negative spin on everything, including the way you see yourself and your expectations for the future.

When these types of thoughts overwhelm you, it’s important to remember that this is a symptom of your depression and these irrational, pessimistic attitudes—known as cognitive distortions—aren’t realistic. When you really examine them they don’t hold up. But even so, they can be tough to give up. You can’t break out of this pessimistic mind frame by telling yourself to “just think positive.” Often, it’s part of a lifelong pattern of thinking that’s become so automatic you’re not even completely aware of it. Rather, the trick is to identify the type of negative thoughts that are fueling your depression, and replace them with a more balanced way of thinking.

Negative, unrealistic ways of thinking that fuel depression

All-or-nothing thinking - Looking at things in black-or-white categories, with no middle

ground (“If I fall short of perfection, I’m a total failure.”)

Overgeneralization - Generalizing from a single negative experience, expecting it to hold true forever (“I can’t do anything right.”)

The mental filter - Ignoring positive events and focusing on the negative. Noticing the one thing that went wrong, rather than all the things that went right.

Diminishing the positive - Coming up with reasons why positive events don’t count (“She said she had a good time on our date, but I think she was just being nice.”)

Jumping to conclusions - Making negative interpretations without actual evidence. You act like a mind reader (“He must think I’m pathetic”) or a fortune teller (“I’ll be stuck in this dead-end job forever.”)

Emotional reasoning - Believing that the way you feel reflects reality (“I feel like such a loser. I really am no good!”)

‘Shoulds’ and ‘should-nots’ - Holding yourself to a strict list of what you should and shouldn’t do, and beating yourself up if you don’t live up to your rules.

Labeling - Classifying yourself based on mistakes and perceived shortcomings (“I’m a failure; an idiot; a loser.”)

Put your thoughts on the witness stand

Once you identify the destructive thoughts patterns that contribute to your depression, you can start to challenge them with questions such as:

“What’s the evidence that this thought is true? Not true?”

“What would I tell a friend who had this thought?”

“Is there another way of looking at the situation or an alternate explanation?”

“How might I look at this situation if I didn’t have depression?”

As you cross-examine your negative thoughts, you may be surprised at how quickly they crumble. In the process, you’ll develop a more balanced perspective and help to relieve your depression.

Professional treatment for depression in men

If support from family and friends and positive lifestyle changes aren't enough, seek help from a mental health professional. Be open about how you're feeling as well as your physical symptoms. [Treatments for depression](#) in men include:

Therapy. You may feel that talking to a stranger about your problems is 'unmanly,' or that therapy carries with it a victim status. However, if [therapy](#) is available to you, it can often bring a swift sense of relief, even to the most skeptical male.

Medication. [Antidepressant medication](#) can help relieve some symptoms of depression, but it doesn't cure the underlying problem and is rarely a long-term solution. Medication also comes with side effects. Even if you decide that medication is right for you, always pursue self-help steps as well. Therapy and lifestyle changes can address the underlying causes of your depression to prevent it returning when you're able to come off antidepressants.

How to help a man with depression

It often takes a wife, partner, or other family member to recognize a man's symptoms of depression. Even if a man suspects he's depressed, he may be ashamed that he's unable to cope on his own and only seek help when pressured to do so by a loved one.

Talking to a man about depression

Many men don't exhibit typical depressive symptoms such as a despondent mood, so you may want to avoid using the word "depression" and try describing his behavior as "stressed" or "overly tired." It could help him to open up.

Point out how his behavior has changed, without being critical. For example, "You always seem get stomach pains before work," or "You haven't played racquetball for months."

Suggest a general check-up with a physician. He may be less resistant to seeing a family doctor than a mental health specialist at first. The doctor can rule out medical causes of depression and then make a referral.

Offer to accompany him on the first visit with a doctor or mental health specialist. Some men are resistant to talking about their feelings, so try to remove roadblocks to him

seeking help.

Encourage him to make a list of symptoms to discuss. Help him focus on his feelings as well as physical ailments, and to be honest about his use of alcohol and drugs.

How to support a man with depression

Engage him in conversation and listen without judgement. Don't disparage any of the feelings he expresses, but do point out realities and offer hope.

Take any remarks about suicide seriously. In the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or find a suicide helpline in another country at [Befrienders Worldwide](#).

Invite him for social activities, whether it's simply a walk together or lunch with friends. If your invitation is refused, keep trying.

Encourage him to participate in activities that once gave him pleasure, such as hobbies, sports, or cultural activities. But don't push him to undertake too much too soon.

Don't tell him to 'just snap out of it.' Instead, reassure him that, with time and support, he will start to feel better.

You may need to monitor whether he is taking prescribed medication or attending therapy. If he's prescribed antidepressants, encourage him to follow orders about the use of alcohol.

Remember, you can't "fix" someone else's depression. You're not to blame for your loved one's depression or responsible for his happiness. While your support can be crucial to his recovery, ultimately, it's in his hands.



Get more help

[Men and Depression](#) (PDF) - Booklet about depression in men: how it looks, how it feels,

HelpGuide

getting help, and getting better. (National Institute of Mental Health)

[Male Depression: Understanding the Issues](#) -Signs and symptoms of depression in men and why male depression tends to go undiagnosed. (Mayo Clinic)

(VIDEO) [Men and depression: Getting the right treatment](#) - How men can display symptoms of depression differently and what treatment options are most useful. (Harvard Health Publishing)

Depression support

In the U.S.: Find [DBSA Chapters/Support Groups](#) or call the [NAMI Helpline](#) for support and referrals at 1-800-950-6264

UK: Find [Depression support groups](#) in-person and online or call the [Mind Infoline](#) at 0300 123 3393

Australia: Find [Support Groups](#) and regional resources or call the [SANE Help Centre](#) at 1800 18 7263

Canada: Call [Mood Disorders Society of Canada](#) at 519-824-5565

India: Call the Vandrevala Foundation [Helpline \(India\)](#) at 1860 2662 345 or 1800 2333 330

Suicide prevention help

In the U.S.: Call [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255

UK and Ireland: Call [Samaritans UK](#) at 116 123

Australia: Call [Lifeline Australia](#) at 13 11 14

Other countries: Visit [IASP](#) or [International Suicide Hotlines](#) to find a helpline near you

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