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# *Emotional health and wellbeing*

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## Myths and misunderstandings

Depression affects people of all ages yet it's commonly misunderstood. This leaflet provides information on recognising and dealing with depression as we grow older.

From time to time we can all feel a bit sad or fed up, especially when something stressful or upsetting has happened. These are a normal reaction to life events and the feelings often fade.

Episodes of depression can be triggered off by stressful events. If you're feeling depressed then you're likely to be experiencing more intense, persistent feelings such as sadness and helplessness. You may also have physical symptoms such as sleeplessness or low energy levels. If these symptoms persist for weeks and stop you functioning normally, then you may have clinical depression, which is a treatable condition.

**It's estimated that one in six people develop clinical depression after they reach 65; this figure can rise to more than one in three for people living in care homes.**



## Signs and symptoms

You may not realise how depressed you are, especially if you've had these feelings for a long time or you've been trying to ignore the symptoms by keeping busy.

If you've felt four or more of the following symptoms for most of the day, nearly every day, for more than two weeks, you should seek help:

- loss of self confidence
- finding it hard to function at home, at work or in your social life
- feeling 'down'
- less concentration than usual
- sleeping too much or too little
- loss of sex drive and/or sexual problems
- feeling tired all the time
- distancing yourself from other people, especially those close to you
- feeling life is pointless
- not caring how you look
- physical aches and pains, sometimes with the fear that you're seriously ill
- self harm
- thinking of suicide or death.



## What to do if you feel you could be depressed

### Speak to your GP

Being older doesn't mean that you'll automatically become depressed, but if you do, help is at hand.

Your General Practitioner (GP) is often your first contact for any health problems as they can support you and give you access to other services and treatments. Here are some useful tips to make sure you get the most out of your visit:

- ask for a double appointment so that you have plenty of time to talk about how you feel without feeling rushed
- write yourself a short list of your problems; this can help you and your GP if you're nervous or struggling to concentrate
- if you're taking several different medications, ask your GP for a review as their side effects or interactions could be affecting your mood and physical health
- take a friend/family member with you if you need support; they could help by take notes and asking questions.

**Experiencing depression can be very isolating. Remember your GP, family and friends can be a big support, so don't be afraid or too proud to admit that you're not coping as well as you used to.**

## Understand your treatment options

### 'Talking treatment'

After discussing how you're feeling, your GP may suggest a 'talking treatment'. These include one-to-one counselling or psychotherapy or a self-help group where you can meet other people who have found ways to cope with their depression.

There can be a great sense of relief in being with people who understand what you're feeling and a sense of achievement in helping each other to find ways to manage and overcome depression.



### Medication

There are several different types of antidepressant medication available, which work by regulating your brain chemicals and improving your mood. If you experience any unpleasant side effects from the medication that you're prescribed then go back to see your GP and they can suggest an alternative.

Give enough time for your medication to start working properly, it may take a few weeks. If you're feeling better, don't stop taking it or change your dosage without consulting your GP; continue the course that your GP has prescribed to ensure that the depression is fully treated.

**A combination of 'talking treatment' and medication may prove to be the most effective option for you. For more information on antidepressants and treatment options visit the Journeys or Mind Cymru websites; see the useful contacts section.**

## Self help

There are many different ways to treat and overcome depression, or learn how to live and cope with it. Here are a few things that you can do to protect against the onset or impact of depression.

### Book Prescription Wales

This is a scheme which supports GPs and practice counsellors to prescribe professionally selected self-help books on a range of topics including depression.

The books are available at every local library across Wales and can be borrowed free of charge. Most of them offer complete step-by-step treatment programmes, including exercises, self-assessments and diary sheets. Ask your GP if this is something you could benefit from.

## Exercise

If you can manage to do some form of exercise, however gentle, it will help you feel better and more positive. Relaxation exercises, such as yoga may help reduce stress levels and anxiety. Check your local leisure centre or library for details of classes. Exercising outdoors, especially in “green” spaces such as parks or the countryside can be more beneficial to your health than exercising indoors.

Ask your GP or your local leisure centre about whether you would qualify for the local Exercise Referral Scheme. This would give you access to 16 weeks of prescribed exercise at the local leisure centre or community venue for a small charge.

**Age Cymru runs a Nordic Walking programme across Wales which is suitable for people aged 50+ and all fitness levels. You walk using a pair of lightweight specially designed poles that provide great support and help. The groups are led by a trained volunteer.**

For more information on taking more exercise, contact Age Cymru for a free leaflet called ‘Physical Activity...Just one step away’.

## Breaks and interests

Holidays or short breaks can bring relief by breaking up the routine. Reading, going out to a film, or listening to music can be relaxing and rewarding. Joining a class or taking up a learning opportunity could also help through increasing your confidence and meeting new people.



## Diet

Try to eat regularly and a balanced diet. This means eating a variety of foods from all the five food groups: fruit and vegetables; carbohydrates, such as bread and potatoes; proteins, such as meat and pulses; dairy products; and fats and sugars in moderation, such as butter and sweets.

If we miss out on valuable nutrients, we are more likely to feel tired and run down. Low levels of vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids can affect mental health, for example, low levels of omega-3 oils have been linked to depression.

**For more information on healthy eating:  
visit the NHS Choices website [www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)  
or  
the Mind 'Food and Mood' guide [www.mind.org.uk/foodandmood](http://www.mind.org.uk/foodandmood)**

## Complementary therapies

These can include treatments such as acupuncture, reflexology, aromatherapy or massage. They can be used in addition to the course of treatment that has been prescribed for you by your GP. If you are considering herbal remedies, it is wise to consult your GP to check that it won't interact with your current medication.

## Information

There are lots of leaflets, books or DVDs available which can give practical advice on coping with depression.

**If you feel you have more enduring or severe emotional wellbeing problems or you are concerned about a friend or relative, contact C.A.L.L. or Mind infoline for support and information or Samaritans.**

## Useful contacts

**This leaflet is part of a series of resources that support the Ageing Well in Wales programme.**

If you would like further information on Ageing Well in Wales or the Nordic Walking programme please contact Age Cymru on:

**Tel:** 029 2043 1555  
[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

## Age Cymru

Age Cymru works in partnership with Age UK to provide advice and information through our advice line, publications and online.

To find out if there's a local Age Cymru near you and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets call:

**Age UK Advice** (covering Wales and with the option to speak to an advisor in Welsh): 08000 223 444  
[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

## Journeys

Journeys support people to find their route to recovery from depression. They provide information, practical resources, services and training and self help groups for people affected by depression, their friends, families and carers.

**Tel:** 029 2069 2891  
[www.journeysonline.org.uk](http://www.journeysonline.org.uk)

## Depression Alliance UK

This UK charity works to relieve and to prevent depression by providing information and support services to those who are affected.

**Tel:** 0845 123 23 20  
[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

## Samaritans

Samaritans provide 24 hour, confidential, emotional support for anyone in crisis.

**Tel:** 08457 909090 (24 hours)

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

## Mind Cymru

Mind provides a range of direct services for people who are experiencing mental distress.

**Tel:** 0845 766 0163 (Mind infoline)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

## C.A.L.L. Helpline, Community Advice and Listening Line -

Mental Health Helpline for Wales

Offers emotional support and information/literature on mental health and related matters to the people of Wales

**Tel:** 0800 132 737 or text 'help' to 81066

[www.callhelpline.org.uk](http://www.callhelpline.org.uk)

If you would like to support our vital work and make a difference to the lives of older people in Wales please contact the fundraising team at Age Cymru on **029 2043 1555** or donate at **[www.agecymru.org.uk/donate](http://www.agecymru.org.uk/donate)**



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