

# Staying positive and preventing depression as you get older

The life changes that come with ageing can lead to depression. To learn more about preventing and treating depression in older age, read on.

## What you should know

- Depression is an illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities, for at least two weeks.
- In addition, people with depression normally have several of the following: a loss of energy; a change in appetite; sleeping more or less; anxiety; reduced concentration; indecisiveness; restlessness; feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or hopelessness; and thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- Depression is common in older people but often overlooked and untreated.
- Depression among older people is often associated with physical conditions, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes or chronic pain; difficult life events, such as losing a partner; and a reduced ability to do things that were possible when younger.
- Older people are at a high risk of suicide.
- Depression is treatable, with talking therapies or antidepressant medication or a combination of these.



### REMEMBER:

**There is a lot that can be done to prevent, and treat, depression in older age.**

## What you can do if you are feeling down, or think you may be depressed

- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
- If you think you are depressed, seek professional help. Your local health-care worker or doctor is a good place to start.
- Keep up with activities that you have always enjoyed, or find alternatives if previous activities are no longer possible.
- Stay connected. Keep in contact with family and friends.
- Eat at regular intervals and get enough sleep.
- Exercise regularly if you can, even if it's just a short walk.
- Avoid or restrict alcohol intake and only take medicine as prescribed by your health-care provider.

# Worried about the future? Preventing depression during your teens and twenties

Adolescence and young adulthood present many opportunities — for meeting new people, visiting new places and finding a direction in life. These years can also be a time of stress. If you are feeling overwhelmed rather than excited by these challenges, read on.

## What you should know

- Depression is an illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities, for at least two weeks.
- In addition, people with depression normally have several of the following: a loss of energy; a change in appetite; sleeping more or less; anxiety; reduced concentration; indecisiveness; restlessness; feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or hopelessness; and thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- Much can be done to prevent and treat depression.



### REMEMBER:

**There is a lot that you can do to keep mentally strong. If you feel that you may be heading for depression, talk to someone you trust or seek professional help.**

## What you can do if you are feeling down, or think you may be depressed

- Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
- Seek professional help. Your local health-care worker or doctor is a good place to start.
- Stay connected. Keep in contact with family and friends.
- Exercise regularly, even if it's just a short walk.
- Stick to regular eating and sleeping habits.
- Avoid or restrict alcohol intake and refrain from using illicit drugs; they can worsen depression.
- Continue doing things you have always enjoyed, even when you don't feel like it.
- Be aware of persistent negative thoughts and self-criticism and try to replace them with positive thoughts. Congratulate yourself on your achievements.

# Do you feel like life is not worth living?

If you sometimes feel that life seems so hard that it is no longer worth living, read on.

## What you might be thinking or feeling

- The pain seems overwhelming and unbearable.
- You feel hopeless, like there is no point in living.
- You are consumed by negative and disturbing thoughts.
- You cannot imagine any solution to your problems other than suicide.
- You imagine death as a relief.
- You think everyone would be better off without you.
- You feel worthless.
- You feel very lonely even when you have friends and family.
- You do not understand why you are feeling or thinking this way.

## What you need to remember

- You are not alone. Many other people have gone through what you are going through and are alive today.
- It is okay to talk about suicide. It can help you feel better.



### REMEMBER:

**If you feel like life is not worth living, reach out for help. You are not alone. Help is available.**

- Having an episode of self-harm or suicidal thoughts or plans is a sign of severe emotional distress (perhaps as a result of the loss of a loved one, loss of employment, a relationship break-up, or experience of violence or abuse). You are not to blame and it can happen to anyone.
- You can get better.
- There are people who can help you.

## What you can do

- Talk to a trusted family member, friend, or colleague about how you feel.
- If you think you are in immediate danger of harming yourself, contact the emergency services or a crisis line, or go there directly.
- Talk to a professional, such as a doctor, mental health professional, counsellor or social worker.
- If you practice a religion, talk to someone from your religious community who you trust.
- Join a self-help or support group for people with lived experience of self-harm. You can help each other to feel better.

# Wondering why your new baby is not making you happy?

Having a baby is a major life event and can cause worry, tiredness and sadness. Usually these feelings don't last long, but if they persist you may be suffering from depression. For more information, read on.

## What you should know

- Depression following childbirth is very common. It affects 1 in 6 women who have given birth. Depression is an illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities, for at least two weeks.
- In addition, people with depression normally have several of the following: a loss of energy; a change in appetite; sleeping more or less; anxiety; reduced concentration; indecisiveness; restlessness; feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or hopelessness; and thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
- Symptoms of depression after childbirth also include: a feeling of being overwhelmed; persistent crying for no apparent reason; lack of bonding with your baby; and doubt about being able to care for yourself and your baby.
- Depression after childbirth can be treated with professional help. Talking treatments and medicines can help. Some medicines can be taken safely while breastfeeding.
- Without treatment, depression following childbirth can last for months or even years. It can affect your health and the development of your baby.



**REMEMBER:**  
Depression after childbirth is very common. If you think you may be affected, seek help.

## What you can do if you think you have depression

- Discuss your feelings with people close to you and ask them for support. They might be able to help you look after the baby when you need some time to yourself or to rest.
- Stay connected by spending time with family and friends.
- Get out in the open air when you can. In safe environments, taking your baby for a walk is good for both of you.
- Talk with other mothers who may have advice or be able to share experiences.
- Talk to your health-care provider. He or she can help you find the treatment that is most appropriate to your situation.
- If you have thoughts of harming yourself or your baby, seek help immediately.

# Do you know someone who may be considering suicide?

Every 40 seconds, someone, somewhere in the world, dies by suicide. For people with severe depression, it is not uncommon to think about suicide.

## What you should know if you are worried about someone

- Suicides are preventable.
- It is okay to talk about suicide.
- Asking about suicide does not provoke the act of suicide. It often reduces anxiety and helps people feel understood.

## Warning signs that someone may be seriously thinking about suicide

- Threatening to kill oneself.
- Saying things like “No-one will miss me when I am gone.”
- Looking for ways to kill oneself, such as seeking access to pesticides, firearms or medication, or browsing the internet for means of taking one's own life.
- Saying goodbye to close family members and friends, giving away of valued possessions, or writing a will.

## Who is at risk of suicide?

- People who have previously tried to take their own life.
- Someone with depression or an alcohol or drug problem.



**REMEMBER:**  
If you know someone who may be considering suicide, talk to them about it. Listen with an open mind and offer your support.

- Those who are suffering from severe emotional distress, for example following the loss of a loved one or a relationship break-up.
- People suffering from chronic pain or illness.
- People who have experienced war, violence, trauma, abuse or discrimination.
- Those who are socially isolated.

## What you can do

- Find an appropriate time and a quiet place to talk about suicide with the person you are worried about. Let them know that you are there to listen.
- Encourage the person to seek help from a professional, such as a doctor, mental health professional, counsellor or social worker. Offer to accompany them to an appointment.
- If you think the person is in immediate danger, do not leave him or her alone. Seek professional help from the emergency services, a crisis line, or a health-care professional, or turn to family members.
- If the person you are worried about lives with you, ensure that he or she does not have access to means of self-harm (for example pesticides, firearms or medication) in the home.
- Stay in touch to check how the person is doing.