

Men and Depression

Mental health issues in men too regularly go undetected or untreated. There are many complex reasons for this, which can often be attributed to a lack of awareness that there is an issue or identifiable symptoms, in the first place. Many people generally are not able to identify or confidently communicate the signs and symptoms that they experience. This, along with the added pressure of associated stigma (shame and embarrassment) can often prevent men from taking action and asking for assistance.

Across all areas of health and wellbeing men tend to delay accessing diagnosis and assistance, believing they are supposed to be tough, independent, and able to cope with pain and be in control. This factor significantly contributes to the reasons why men are far more likely to suffer from serious health issues, as the opportunity for early intervention is lost and can make it difficult to accept they have a health problem, let alone a mental health issue.

To many men, being “manly” means not expressing emotions or admitting to any vulnerabilities. Instead, some men act out with dangerous behaviour to attempt to numb or avoid the actual issues they’re facing.

Depression can be a serious condition that won’t just get better on its own. You wouldn’t expect a broken arm to heal without seeking medical help, the same goes for depression.

One in eight men experience depression at some stage of their life. Depression can present in a number of feelings and reactions, including feeling irritable or angry, rather than feeling low. It is normal to occasionally feel ‘down’ or upset, but if you find yourself continuously feeling angry, sad, or moody, or are having trouble sleeping or concentrating, it could be something more concerning or serious. You might also find yourself beginning to lose interest in the things you once enjoyed.

The three most common signs of depression in men are:

- **Physical pain:** such as backache, frequent headaches, sleep problems, sexual dysfunction, or digestive disorders.
- **Anger:** this could range from irritability, sensitivity to criticism, or a loss of sense of humor, to road rage, a short temper, or even violence.
- **Reckless behavior:** this could involve pursuing dangerous sports, driving recklessly, abusing drugs, or gambling compulsively.

It’s not clear what the exact causes of depression are as it’s different for each person, however there are some known high risk factors for men.

Social isolation and loneliness are now widely accepted as risk factors for both depression and anxiety. 2014 Research suggests that men aged 30 to 65 experience more loneliness and have smaller social networks than women in the same age bracket. One in four men in their middle years experience low levels of social support, and an alarming 25% of men admitting they have no one outside of their immediate family they can rely on.

The good news is that there are actions you can take to protect yourself and assist recovery from depression. Good interpersonal relationships and social connectedness are considered protective factors that have a positive impact on both mental and general health and wellbeing.

If you can, seek out a trusted friend and/or family member. Share what you’re going through with the people you love and trust. The people you talk to don’t have to be able to fix you; they just need to be good listeners - Ask for the help and support you need. You may have retreated from your most treasured relationships, but they can get you



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through this tough time.

Alternatively, if it is difficult for you to approach your friends or family consider seeking some professional advice or support; the GP can be a good place to start.

Remember that isolation and loneliness make depression even worse, so maintaining your close relationships and social activities are vital to increasing your wellbeing. 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 might make you feel less depressed. Below are some helpful tips for reaching out and building relationships.

Join a support group. Being with others who are facing the same problems can help reduce your sense of isolation and remove the stigma you may feel.

Volunteering can be a great way to help others while also expanding your social network.

Invite someone to a sports game or movie. There are plenty of other people who feel just as awkward about reaching out and making new 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.

Be a good listener. To develop a strong friendship with someone, be prepared to listen and support them just as you want them to listen and support you.

Confide in a counsellor or coach.

Overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, but it's far from impossible even though it can't be beaten through willpower alone. The key is to start small. Feeling better takes time, but you can get there if you make positive choices for yourself each day.

A person needs to find new ways to manage, and live with the changes and challenges of having depression. Lifestyle changes are extremely effective tools at treating depression in men.

Exercise regularly. Regular exercise is a powerful way to deal with depression for men. Not only does it boost serotonin, endorphins, and other feel-good brain chemicals, it triggers the growth of new brain cells and connections, just as antidepressants do. It also boosts self-esteem and helps to improve sleep. For maximum results, aim for 30 to 60 minutes of activity on most days.

Eat well. Eating small, well-balanced meals throughout the day will help you keep your energy up and minimize mood swings. While you may be drawn to sugary foods for the quick boost they provide, complex carbohydrates are a better choice. They'll get you going without the sugar crash. Deficiencies in B vitamins can trigger depression so take a B-complex vitamin supplement or eat more citrus fruit, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs.

Get enough sleep. When you don't get enough sleep, your depression symptoms can be worse. Sleep deprivation exacerbates anger, irritability, and moodiness. Aim for somewhere between 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.

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