



LOOKING AFTER
YOUR MENTAL
HEALTH

WHAT IS DEPRESSION AND **WHY** DO YOU GET IT?

Most people don't treat their mental health in the same way that they do their physical health - but we all should. Many of us try to do things to keep our bodies well like limiting fatty foods and being active, and we seek medical help if we start to experience pain. But we don't look after our minds in the same way, or seek help if it starts to become unwell.

If you experience low mood that's impacting your ability to do everyday tasks for most of the day, every day, for more than two weeks, you should seek help from your GP first. Like any other illness, depression may become worse if left untreated.

Sometimes it's really clear why you've become depressed but other times there isn't an obvious reason why you feel so down. Both are ok. The nature of depression can stop you from talking about your illness, cutting you off from help. But you can be helped. Like many physical illnesses, depression can be treated and you can recover.

Being depressed isn't your fault. It's often down to chemical changes in the brain. When we're mentally unwell, negative emotions overwhelm our logical brain and this means our logical brain struggles to switch them off as it's overpowered.

TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

- **Take regular exercise.** It helps with your mood, motivation and the ability to cope with stress - it can also reduce feelings of helplessness and anxiety. You don't have to go to the gym, things like walking around your local park count too.
- **Try to eat small regular meals throughout the day.** Our brain needs nutritious food as fuel to recover.
- **Limit alcohol and avoid drugs** as they alter your brain chemistry. A glass of wine or a pint after a hard day might initially help you relax but in the long run it can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety.
- **Talk to someone** about any worries you've got or write things down.
- **Find ways to relax.** Find something that works for you like reading, listening to music, having a bath, deep breathing or mindfulness.
- **Volunteering** helps some people look after their mental health as doing things for others makes them feel good. You can also make friends through this, which means you have more people that can support you if you start to feel low.
- **Learn to recognise what causes you to feel stressed** and work out ways to help you cope when these things happen. Take a look at the 'crisis card' on www.portsmouth.gov.uk/mentalhealth for services that can help with stressful situations like debt, employment, bereavement and housing issues.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING TO COPE

- The most important thing to remember is that you're not alone, and there is always someone to help you
- Try not to think about the future – just focus on getting through today
- If you haven't already visited your GP, make an emergency appointment. Medication helps a lot of people so don't feel ashamed to take it. Anti-depressants can increase the good chemicals in your brain, making you more responsive to other types of treatment.
- Stay away from drugs and alcohol - they might provide a temporary fix but they'll make you feel worse in the long-run
- Get yourself to a safe place, like a friend's house and be around other people
- Sometimes when we are mentally unwell our minds can tell us to harm ourselves. This can be part of the illness and as we recover this can subside. Don't panic, seek help.
Visit [connectingwithpeople.org/StayingSafe](https://www.connectingwithpeople.org/StayingSafe)
- Do something you usually enjoy, such as spending time with a pet
- Talk to someone. If you find it difficult to talk to someone you know, visit www.portsmouth.gov.uk/mentalhealth for a list of services that can help you.



You can get this information in large print, Braille, audio or in another language by calling 02392 84 1714