

Understanding Depression in Men: Indicators, Symptoms, Causes, and Support Options

What is depression in men?

Depression in men is a common condition that can affect anyone at some point. Many men see themselves as strong and in control of their emotions, so they might deny or hide feelings of hopelessness or overwhelming despair. It's important to recognize that experiencing depression is not a sign of weakness or a failure of masculinity.

Millions of men across different ages and backgrounds are impacted by depression, as are their loved ones—partners, family, and friends. It's normal to feel sad or down occasionally, especially after setbacks or disappointments. However, male depression often alters how you think, feel, and function daily, potentially disrupting work, relationships, sleep, appetite, and overall happiness. In severe cases, depression can be persistent and intense.

Because many men find it difficult to talk openly about their feelings, depression in men can be overlooked. Instead, physical symptoms like back pain, headaches, sleep issues, or sexual problems may be emphasized, which can delay proper diagnosis and treatment, leading to serious consequences.

Men facing depression are four times more likely to consider suicide than women, highlighting the importance of seeking help early. Speaking honestly with a trusted friend, loved one, or healthcare professional about your mental and physical health is crucial. With proper diagnosis and support, depression can be effectively treated and managed, helping to prevent future episodes.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression in Men

Men often find it harder than women to recognize the symptoms of depression. They tend to deny or obscure their feelings, either hiding them from themselves or masking them with other behaviors. While men can experience typical depression symptoms such as persistent sadness, disinterest in work or hobbies, weight and sleep disturbances, fatigue, and concentration issues, they are more likely to experience subtler “stealth” symptoms like anger, substance abuse, and agitation.

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

1. **Physical Pain:** Depression can manifest as unexplained physical symptoms—such as backaches, frequent headaches, sleep issues, sexual dysfunction, or digestive problems—that don’t improve with usual treatments.
2. **Anger:** This may appear as irritability, sensitivity to criticism, a loss of humor, road rage, a short temper, or even aggressive and controlling behaviors. Some men may become abusive or violent.
3. **Reckless Actions:** Depression may lead to risky or escapist behaviors, including participating in dangerous sports, reckless driving, unsafe sex, excessive drinking, drug abuse, or compulsive gambling.

How to Recognize Male Depression

If several of the following symptoms resonate with you, it could indicate depression:

1. Feeling hopeless or helpless
2. Losing interest in friends, activities, and hobbies you once enjoyed
3. Becoming more irritable, short-tempered, or aggressive
4. Increasing your alcohol intake, engaging in reckless behaviors, or self-medicating
5. Feeling restless or agitated
6. Noticing changes in sleep or appetite

7. Struggling with concentration or experiencing a decline in work performance
8. Being unable to control 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.

Call the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in Canada and the U.S. at 988. For help outside Canada and the U.S., visit [Befrienders Worldwide](#).

Triggers for Depression in Men

Depression in men doesn't stem from a single cause; instead, it results from a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors, along with lifestyle habits, relationships, and coping skills.

While any man can experience depression, certain risk factors can increase vulnerability, including:

- Loneliness and a lack of social support
- Difficulty managing stress effectively
- A history of alcohol or drug abuse
- Experiences of trauma or abuse during childhood
- Aging in isolation, with limited social interactions

Recognizing these factors can help in understanding and addressing the risk of depression.

Depression and Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is both a contributor to depression in men and a potential side effect of many antidepressant medications.

- Men experiencing sexual problems are nearly twice as likely to be depressed as those without such issues.

- Depression can increase the likelihood of developing erectile dysfunction.
- Many men hesitate to discuss sexual problems, often viewing them as a reflection of their masculinity rather than recognizing them as treatable issues related to depression.
- Treatments like ED medications can often help improve sexual function and address these concerns.

Getting Support for Male Depression

Don't try to endure depression alone. It takes courage to seek help—whether from someone you trust or a mental health professional. Many men find that adopting self-help strategies—such as reaching out socially, exercising regularly, eating healthily, and making lifestyle adjustments—can lead to significant improvement.

Remember, progress may be gradual. You might start feeling a bit better each day, with improvements in sleep and appetite often coming before a lift in mood. These self-care steps can profoundly influence your thoughts and feelings, helping you manage depression and rediscover joy in life.

Tip 1: Reach Out to Others

While work and commitments can make nurturing friendships challenging, connecting face-to-face with genuine support is an essential first step. This isn't about casual banter; it's about finding someone you trust to share your feelings openly—someone who listens without judging or offering unwanted advice.

Even if you think discussing feelings isn't macho, you're already expressing your emotions non-verbally. Notice your reactions—irritability, increased drinking, or anger—and recognize they may signal a need for support. Talking about what you're experiencing can be remarkably healing.

Building Your Support Network

Reaching out when struggling can feel intimidating, but developing strong relationships is crucial during tough times. If you feel isolated, remember that it's never too late to foster new connections and strengthen your support system.

How to Reach Out



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Seek support from people who make you feel safe and cared for. Your confidant doesn't need to fix your problems—they just need to listen with empathy and patience.

Prioritize face-to-face interactions over just calls or texts. Genuine conversations in person can drastically ease depression and serve as a proactive measure to prevent its worsening.

Stay engaged with social activities, even if you don't feel like it. Social withdrawal may seem easier, but being around others can help lift your spirits.

Help Others

Supporting someone else can give your mood a substantial boost. Volunteer, listen to friends, or do small acts of kindness—they can be powerful tools in recovery.

Consider caring for a pet. Pets offer companionship, bring joy, and help reduce feelings of loneliness, providing a meaningful connection that can counteract depression.

Join a Support Group

Sharing experiences with others facing similar struggles can lessen feelings of isolation. Support groups provide a safe space to exchange advice, encouragement, and understanding.

Reach out to friends

Don't hesitate to reconnect with old friends through calls, emails, or invitations to events like games or concerts. Making the first move can help rebuild important relationships and open the door to new support.

Tip 2: Prioritize Your Health

Making positive lifestyle changes can significantly help elevate your mood and prevent depression from returning.

Get Enough Sleep



Aim for about eight hours of quality sleep each night. Sleep disturbances—whether sleeping too little or too much—can negatively affect your mood. Establish healthy sleep routines to promote better rest.

Manage Stress

Chronic stress can prolong and intensify depression, and it may even trigger episodes. Identify stressors in your life—such as work pressure, financial worries, or difficult relationships—and take steps to reduce their impact, helping you regain a sense of control.

Practice Relaxation Techniques

Incorporate relaxation practices into your daily routine to alleviate depression symptoms, reduce stress, and enhance feelings of happiness. Options include yoga, deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation.

Get Outside and Soak Up Sunlight

Spending time outdoors during the day can boost serotonin levels and improve your mood. Go for a walk, enjoy your coffee outside, do some gardening, or combine exercise with sunshine. If sunlight is scarce, consider using a light therapy box.

Create a “Wellness Toolbox”

Develop a list of activities that you can use for a quick mood boost. Having a variety of coping strategies increases resilience. Aim to try a few each day—even on good days—to build a strong mental toolkit.

Sample Activities:

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

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

Tip 3: Exercise to Improve Mental and Physical Well-Being

When you're feeling depressed, even getting out of bed can seem overwhelming, let alone exercising. However, physical activity is a powerful tool in fighting depression and is key to your recovery. Studies have shown that regular exercise can be as effective as medication in reducing depression symptoms, and it also helps prevent relapse after recovery.

Aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. It doesn't have to be done all at once—starting small is perfectly fine. A simple 10-minute walk can lift your mood and provide benefits for up to two hours.

Exercise is a simple way you can actively boost your mood right now. Although fatigue and low energy make beginning difficult, persistence pays off. Regular activity can increase your energy levels and reduce tiredness over time.

Choose exercises that involve continuous, rhythmic movements. The most beneficial types for depression include walking, weight training, swimming, or martial arts—activities that involve coordinated movement of your arms and legs.

Incorporate mindfulness into your routine, especially if your depression is linked to unresolved trauma or negative thoughts. Pay attention to how your body feels during movement—the sensation of your feet hitting the ground, the wind on your skin, or your breathing rhythm—to stay present and grounded.

Find an exercise partner to stay motivated. Exercising with others not only makes the activity more enjoyable but also fosters social connection. Consider joining a running club, finding tennis partners, or signing up for team sports like soccer or volleyball.

If you have a dog, take it for a walk. If not, consider volunteering at an animal shelter to walk homeless dogs. This not only benefits your mood but also helps socialize and exercise the dogs, making them more likely to find a new home.

Tip 4: Maintain a Healthy Diet to Enhance Your Mood

The foods you eat directly influence how you feel. Limit Sugar and Refined Carbohydrates

Craving sweets, baked goods, or comfort foods like pasta and fries is common, but these tend to cause a quick spike in energy followed by a sharp drop in mood and vitality.

Reduce intake of foods that can negatively impact your mood, such as caffeine, alcohol, trans fats, and foods containing high levels of chemical preservatives or hormones.

Incorporate Omega-3 Fatty Acids Boost your mood by eating more Omega-3-rich foods. Excellent sources include fatty fish like salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, as well as seaweed, flaxseed, and walnuts.

Choose Mood-Enhancing Foods

Opt for when you need an emotional lift. Bananas, for example, contain magnesium (reduces anxiety), vitamin B6 (promotes alertness), and tryptophan (helps increase serotonin, the mood hormone). Spinach is rich in magnesium and folate, which can reduce agitation and improve sleep quality.

Prevent B Vitamin Deficiencies

Being deficient in B vitamins can trigger depression. Incorporate more citrus fruits, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs into your diet to maintain healthy levels.

Tip 5: Challenge Negative Thinking

Do you sometimes feel powerless, weak, or convinced that bad things will always happen? That your situation is hopeless? Depression often distorts our perspective, casting a negative light on ourselves and our future.

When these overwhelming thoughts arise, remember they are symptoms of depression. These irrational, pessimistic beliefs—called cognitive distortions—are not reality. Taking a closer look at them often reveals they don't hold up under scrutiny. However, letting go of these patterns can still be challenging.

Telling yourself to “just think positive” usually isn’t enough because such thoughts have become automatic habits. Instead, focus on recognizing the specific negative thoughts fueling your depression and actively replacing them with more balanced, realistic ones.

Common Negative Thought Patterns in Male Depression:

- All-or-Nothing Thinking: Seeing things only in extremes (“If I’m not perfect, I’m a failure”)
- Overgeneralization: Believing one bad experience predicts everything (“I can’t do anything right”)
- Mental Filter: Ignoring positive events and fixating on negatives
- Diminishing the Positive: Discounting good moments as insignificant (“She said she enjoyed our date, but she was just being polite”)
- Jumping to Conclusions: Making negative assumptions without evidence (“She must think I’m pathetic” or “I’ll be stuck in this job forever”)
- Emotional Reasoning: Assuming feelings reflect reality (“I feel like a loser; I must be one”)
- ‘Shoulds’ and ‘Should-Nots’: Criticizing yourself for not meeting strict standards Labeling: Defining yourself by mistakes or flaws (“I’m a failure” or “I’m an idiot”)

Putting Negative Thoughts on the Witness Stand:

Once you identify these destructive patterns, challenge them with questions such as:

- “What’s the evidence that this thought is true? Or untrue?”
- “What would I tell a friend who had this thought?” “Is there an alternative explanation or perspective?”
- “How would I view this situation if I weren’t depressed?”

By critically examining and questioning your negative thoughts, they often lose their power, allowing you to develop a more balanced outlook and easing some of your depression.

Professional Approaches to Treating Depression in Men

If support from family and friends and positive lifestyle changes aren't sufficient, it's important to consult a mental health professional. Be honest about your feelings and physical symptoms. Treatment options for depression in men include:

Therapy:

Some men may feel that discussing personal issues with a stranger is unmanly or view therapy as a sign of weakness. However, seeking therapy can often provide quick relief, even for those skeptical about it. Online therapy sessions conducted from the comfort of your home can also be an effective and convenient option.

Medication:

Antidepressants can alleviate certain depression symptoms, but they don't address the root causes and are usually not a long-term solution. Medication may also have side effects. If you choose to take medication, it's crucial to complement it with self-help strategies. Combining therapy and lifestyle adjustments can target underlying issues to reduce the likelihood of relapse once you stop taking antidepressants.

How to Support a Man with Depression

Often, it's up to a wife, partner, or other family members to notice the signs of depression in a man. Even if a man suspects he's depressed, he may feel ashamed or embarrassed about struggling and might only seek help when someone he trusts encourages him to do so.

Talking to a Man About Depression:

Many men don't display the typical signs of depression, such as persistent sadness. Instead, consider avoiding the direct use of the word "depression" and focus on describing his behavior as "stressed" or "overly fatigued." This approach can make it easier for him to open up.

Gently point out behavioral changes without criticism, such as, "You always seem to get stomach pains before work," or "You haven't played racquetball in months."

Suggest he schedule a general check-up with a primary care doctor. He might be more open to seeing a family doctor initially rather than a mental health specialist. The doctor can rule out any medical causes of his symptoms and provide a referral if needed.

Offer to go with him to the first appointment—this support can make him feel more comfortable and less resistant to discussing his feelings.

How to Support a Man with Depression

Engage him in open, non-judgmental conversations and listen carefully. Acknowledge his feelings without criticism, while gently pointing out realities and offering hope.

Take any statements about suicide very seriously. In Canada and the U.S., contact the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988. Internationally, you can find support through [Befrienders Worldwide](#).

Invite him to join social activities, like a walk or lunch with friends. If he declines, continue to extend invitations patiently.

Encourage participation in activities he once enjoyed, such as hobbies, sports, or cultural events. Be supportive without pressuring him to do too much at once.

Avoid saying, “Just snap out of it.” Instead, reassure him that with time and proper support, he will start to feel better.

Keep track of whether he is following his treatment plan, including taking prescribed medication and attending therapy sessions. If he's on antidepressants, remind him to avoid alcohol unless advised otherwise.

Remember, you cannot “fix” his depression. You're not responsible for his feelings or happiness. While your support plays an important role, his recovery ultimately depends on his own effort and treatment.

Encourage him to prepare a list of symptoms to discuss, including emotional states, physical symptoms, and any use of alcohol or drugs. This can help him communicate more openly and ensure he gets the assistance he needs.

Depression support, suicide prevention help

Depression support

Canada	Call Mood Disorders Society of Canada at 519-824-5565
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	Call the SANE Help Centre at 1800 18 7263
Canada	Call Mood Disorders Society of Canada at 519-824-5565
India 1800 2333 330	Call the Vandrevalla Foundation Helpline (India) at 1860 2662 345 or 1800 2333 330

Suicide prevention help

In the U.S. and Canada Call [988](#)

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

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

Other countries Visit [IASP](#) or [Suicide.org](#) to find a helpline near you

Helpful links

1. [\(VIDEO\) Getting the right treatment](#) - Harvard Health Publishing video exploring how men display symptoms of depression differently and what treatment options are most useful. (YouTube)

2. [Understanding the issues](#) – Signs and symptoms of depression in men and why male depression tends to go undiagnosed. (Mayo Clinic)
3. [getting help](#) – Booklet about depression in men: how it looks, how it feels, getting help, and getting better. (National Institute of Mental Health)

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