

# MEN AND DEPRESSION



***“I was still functioning – just not as well as I used to. I just felt a bit flat and irritable. I suppose I really didn’t think it was bad enough to do anything about it.”***

*Man with experience of depression*

## **What is depression?**

Depression (mate pāpouri) is a feeling of sadness and hopelessness, or loss of interest and pleasure. It is experienced most of the day, every day, and lasts at least two weeks. Some men may feel angry and irritable rather than sad.

Depression is common and can affect all ages, genders, cultures and socio-economic groups.

Depression is a serious health issue that you should attend to. It is not something you can just ‘snap out of’, but it can be treated, and you are entitled to the help you need.

## **What treatment is available?**

Depression can be treated, allowing you to live a good life full of enjoyment. Treatment is usually a combination of two or more of the following:

- **Talking therapy**, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Therapy or Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- **Medication**, such as antidepressants
- Lifestyle changes, such as diet, exercise and sleep
- Traditional medicine, such as rongoā.

## **Why don’t men seek treatment as much?**

While depression is common, men are not diagnosed with it as often as women. Reasons for this include:

- Men may not easily recognise depression as it can present differently (see the back page)
- Men are often focused on being successful and self-reliant and can play down difficulties
- Some men aren’t used to talking about their feelings or asking for help and advice.

## Helping yourself

As well as seeking treatment, there are some ways to begin helping yourself. Remember that improvement is usually gradual and happens over time, so be patient with yourself.

- Try to tell someone how you feel. Keep trying to reach out to others, e.g. a partner, close friend or whānau member.
- Exercise can help, particularly exercising outdoors.
- Eat a variety of fresh foods in a well-balanced diet.
- Keep a regular sleep routine.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs – they may make you feel good in the short term but worse in the long run.
- Do things you enjoy, often. Join a sports team, kapa haka group or choir, or spend time gardening, woodworking, playing music or making art.
- Check your lifestyle. Are you working too hard? Are you under stress at work?
- Take a break – try to get away from your normal routine for a few days or even a few hours.
- Use music, yoga or meditation to help you relax.
- Learn more about depression and use online self-help and learning programmes like [smallsteps.org.nz](https://smallsteps.org.nz) or [justathought.co.nz](https://justathought.co.nz)

***Once you can recognise depression, with the right support you can find a way through it.***



## Getting help

The best place to start is by visiting your GP or Māori hauora/health provider.

Get a check-up to see if there are physical problems or medicines that are affecting how you feel. Your healthcare provider can help you get the āwhina (support) and treatment you need.

Other people who can help you find treatment may be:

- Friends or whānau/family
- Religious or spiritual support services
- Your local Citizens Advice Bureau
- Marae-based community support services
- Culturally-based community support services
- Work employee assistance programmes (EAP), which are free for employees.

There are also telephone helplines which can give you the opportunity to discuss things anonymously. The helplines below all operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- *Free call or text **1737** to talk with a trained counsellor*
- *Depression Helpline: call **0800 111 757** or text **4202***
- *Lifeline: call **0800 LIFELINE** (0800 543 354) or text **HELP** (4357)*
- *Youthline: call **0800 376 633** or free text **234**.*

***“I was down for ages after we broke up.  
After a while I knew I was over it and  
ready to move on, but no matter what I did,  
the sadness wouldn’t go away.”***

*Man with experience of depression*



## How do men experience depression?

There are several signs and symptoms of depression. Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom – some will only experience a few, others will have many. Often, men who are depressed may be more aware of symptoms in their body rather than emotional symptoms. You may notice:

- Feeling tired, having no energy
- Feeling irritable, restless or 'on edge'
- Anger and hostility towards others
- Feeling isolated and withdrawing from whānau and friends
- Losing interest in work and things you used to enjoy
- Feeling dejected, empty or numb, often first thing in the morning
- Sleeping difficulties – difficulty getting to sleep, waking too early in the morning, waking through the night or oversleeping
- Headaches, other aches and pains or digestive issues
- Loss of interest in sex
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Feeling guilty, embarrassed or ashamed
- Having problems thinking clearly, concentrating or making decisions; being forgetful
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Suicide attempts
- Drinking or using drugs too much
- Risky or reckless behaviour, such as dangerous driving.



## Some risk factors for depression in men

Depression is a common experience – many people experience it at times in their lives. You may be more at risk if you live with the following risk factors, but with help and support, you can feel better.

Exercising and eating well, getting plenty of rest, and connecting with others are all pieces of the puzzle.

Risk factors include:

- Having been depressed before
- Having a whānau/family member who has been depressed
- Living with addictions
- Chronic health problems
- Separation or divorce
- Work stress
- Money worries
- Major life changes, like retirement or unemployment
- For LGBT+ people, the stresses associated with coming out
- Feeling lonely or isolated

## Connect with others

Peer support groups can connect you with others who have similar experiences.

Find group listings here: [mentalhealth.org.nz/groups](https://mentalhealth.org.nz/groups)

## Keep learning

Learn more about depression and strategies that can help. **Healthify.nz** and **depression.org.nz** are good sources of information. Find book reviews at [mentalhealth.org.nz/books](https://mentalhealth.org.nz/books) or visit your local library.

## Resources


The Mental Health Foundation has a range of free mental health and wellbeing information and resources. Visit [shop.mentalhealth.org.nz](https://shop.mentalhealth.org.nz)

## Find us online

To find out more about our work, visit:

 [resource@mentalhealth.org.nz](mailto:resource@mentalhealth.org.nz)

 [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

 [mhfnz](https://www.instagram.com/mhfnz)

 [mentalhealthfoundationNZ](https://www.facebook.com/mentalhealthfoundationNZ)

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