DEPRESSION

Getting the support you need



Mental Health Foundation
OF NEW ZEALAND
mauri tū, mauri ora

What is depression?

Depression is more than feeling down or blue for a little while. It is an ongoing feeling of pōuritanga/unhappiness that can affect how you feel and function for weeks or longer. With the right support and treatment, most people can and do recover.

Who gets depression?

It's common to experience depression. It can affect anyone, at any stage of life. You might be at greater risk if you have a family history of depression, are going through stressful life events, have a physical illness, have experienced trauma or significant stress during childhood, take certain medications, or feel socially or culturally isolated.

How do people experience depression?

There are several types of depression, and symptoms can range from mild to severe. You might have some of the following experiences:

- feeling low, sad or tearful
- hopelessness and a lack of joy
- losing confidence
- increased irritability
- feeling numb or disconnected
- withdrawing from people, places or activities you usually enjoy
- changes in your appetite
- difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more than usual
- tiredness, fatigue or reduced energy
- challenges with thinking clearly
- lack of motivation or feeling restless
- feeling worthless or guilty
- symptoms of anxiety, like panic attacks, physical symptoms (such as muscle tension, a racing heart or a dry mouth), excessive worry about your health, or phobias
- psychosis (loss of contact with reality)
- thoughts of suicide or death.

If you are struggling with overwhelming thoughts or feelings, it's important to reach out for help.

Some people might experience depression during or after pregnancy, known as **perinatal** or **postpartum depression**. Others may notice symptoms the week before their period is due, known as **premenstrual dysphoric disorder** (PMDD).

Depression can also occur for those living with **bipolar disorder**, or alongside conditions like chronic pain, stroke or hypothyroidism. For some, symptoms are linked to the seasons, often winter. This is called **seasonal affective disorder** (SAD).

When symptoms start to impact your daily life, it is important to seek help – often your general practitioner (GP) or health professional is a helpful place to start.

Getting support

It can be difficult to ask for help, but there is support available if you are experiencing depression. Getting the right support can help you to better understand the symptoms you are experiencing and support your recovery.

Find what works for you, and if one option isn't helping, try another. Often people find that a combination of tools and strategies works best.

Talk to someone you trust. Just sharing how you feel with a friend, whānau member or colleague can help you feel better, and remind you that your loved ones are there to support you.

Talk to your GP or health professional. They can help you find the treatment plan that is best for you. Before your visit, you might like to think of some questions to ask your GP. It can be helpful to prepare these questions with the support of someone you trust.

Medication. Your GP might prescribe medication to help you manage depression. It's important that you don't stop taking medication without speaking to your doctor first.

Talking therapy. This involves talking with a trained professional such as a counsellor, psychologist, health improvement practitioner, psychotherapist or nurse. They can help you understand your thoughts and behaviours, and provide strategies to help you manage these. They can also offer behavioural interventions designed to improve your mood. Your GP can help you to access this support.

Peer support. Joining a support group can be a helpful way to hear from people who have had similar experiences. Find support group listings at **mentalhealth.org.nz/groups**

Cultural support. You might wish to seek support from a service that understands your cultural background, language or faith.

Traditional medicines. Consider rongoā or other traditional healing approaches as part of your recovery.

Find information and support services at:
www.mentalhealth.org.nz/help

What can I do?

Recovery can take time and improvement can be gradual. Doing the small things that make you feel better, stronger and more in control will support your recovery.

- Start with **one small, manageable step**, like picking up the phone to call a friend, or putting shoes on to go for a walk. This can help you get started.
- **Change your environment**. You could spend time outdoors and notice what you can see and hear.
- Keep a **mood diary** to help you identify early signs of depression, and the factors than can impact your mood. It can also be helpful to **share** these signs with someone you trust, so that they can help you to get support early.
- Spend time with people you care about. **Connecting with others** can help you feel happier and more secure.
- Prioritise your **physical health**. Moving your body, eating well, and avoiding drugs and alcohol can help.
- Aim to get plenty of **sleep**, and focus on establishing a regular sleep pattern. Visit this link for more tips on how to support your sleep: **healthify.nz/sleep-tips**
- Maintain a regular **daily routine**. This can offer you a sense of control.
- Make time for **activities you enjoy**, such as playing an instrument, painting, sport or listening to music.
- Practise **relaxation and mindfulness** techniques, like yoga, meditation, mirimiri/massage, or deep breathing exercises.
- Do a free **online course** to learn more about depression, like this one from *Just a Thought:* **justathought.co.nz/courses/depression**



Supporting someone who has depression

It can be hard to know how to help someone with depression, but your aroha and support can make a big difference.

- Remember they are going through tough times. **Be gentle** and let them know you are there for them.
- People experiencing depression may find everyday tasks harder than usual – this doesn't mean they are lazy. Offer to **help with tasks** like making appointments or helping them find a support group. Practical support like picking up groceries, childcare, or folding laundry can also be helpful.
- Let them guide you on the level of support they would like, and encourage them to ask for help if they need it.
- **Listen with an open mind**. You don't need to have all the answers, but it is important to validate their experiences.
- Encourage and support them to **seek treatment**, and to persevere with therapy and medication if prescribed.
- **Make a plan** to have regular check-ins. Take note of how they are doing, and have a plan for who to turn to if things get worse.
- Do something together you both enjoy, like going for a walk or cooking a meal.

When supporting someone you care about, it's important to look after your own wellbeing too. You can't pour from an empty cup – know your limits and ask for help from others when you need it.



Tips and tools

To learn more about depression visit **mentalhealth.org.nz**, **healthify.nz** or **depression.org.nz**

For more free tools to help you manage your depression and support your wellbeing at home, visit **headstrong.org.nz** or **justathought.co.nz**, or download the Groov app at **groovnow.com/groov-app**

Helplines

Talking with a trained professional can help.

- Call or text **1737** to speak to a trained counsellor, 24/7.
- Contact **Lifeline** on 0800 543 354 or free text 4357 between 7am and midnight.

Find other helplines at **mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines**

In crisis?

If you are in crisis, it's important to get help immediately. Call 111 or your local mental health crisis team. You can find the contact details at **mentalhealth.org.nz/help**

Resources

The Mental Health Foundation has a range of free mental health and wellbeing information and resources. Visit **mentalhealth.org.nz**

Find us online

Find out more about our work:

resource@mentalhealth.org.nz
mentalhealth.org.nz
mhfnz
mentalhealthfoundationNZ

Disclaimer

This brochure should not be used in place of an accurate mental health diagnosis or assessment. If you think you may have a mental health condition or would like further information or support, please talk to your GP or Māori health provider.

We need your help

To create free resources like this, we rely on the generosity of people like you. Donate now to support our work lifting the mental health of all New Zealanders at **donate.mentalhealth.org.nz**

This resource was produced with input from many people. Special thanks go to Dr Joanna Macfarlane (www.stablepsychology.me) and to our team members with lived experience. The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, 2026.

All images used: Stock images with actors. Cover: Irene Maton, Truestock.