

# DEPRESSION

## Information for those affected by prolonged depression

## **What is depression?**

Depression is usually a less severe down period in life when passivity and a low mood take over for a limited time.

However, depression can be a serious, even life-threatening condition. Depression is one of the most common causes of ill health in the world. In Sweden, almost half of all women and a quarter of all men experience depression that may require treatment at some point in their lives.

### Common symptoms of depression

- a low mood and melancholy
- less interest in things and unhappiness
- reduced activity
- weight gain or weight loss
- sleep issues
- physical restlessness or inertia
- lack of energy
- feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- reduced concentration
- recurring thoughts of death

## **Why do people get depressed?**

There are many reasons why people develop depression. These include, for example, hereditary disposition, external stresses, a personal vulnerability and an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Sometimes, however, you can get depressed without knowing why. This is especially true if you suffer from recurrent depression.

***External stresses*** Examples of external stresses that can lead to depression are loneliness, the death of a loved one and financial difficulties. Even positive and perhaps much-anticipated major changes in life, such as moving house, starting a new job, becoming a parent or the children moving away from home, can trigger depression. Long-term stress and a lack of rest and recovery are other factors that increase the risk of developing depression.

***Personal vulnerability*** Different people have different vulnerability to prolonged depression. Vulnerability is affected by, among other factors, who you are as a person and your genetics; but it can also be affected by the environment in which you have grown up and the adversity that you have faced in your life. A safe, stable and supportive life situation can prevent you developing depression, even though you have a vulnerability to it.

***Chemicals in the brain*** In the brain and in the rest of the nervous system, there is something called neurotransmitters. These are substances that carry messages between the different cells in the brain. The neurotransmitters provide the basis for a person's state of mind, mood, behaviour, emotions and thoughts. In cases of depression, an imbalance develops in the interaction between the neurotransmitters and the cells. Some of the neurotransmitters that play a part in depression are serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine.

***Other causes*** Depressive states can also be caused by some physical disorders, certain medications, drugs or an overconsumption of alcohol. It is also common to develop depression in connection with other mental disorders, such as panic disorder, social phobia and post-traumatic stress disorder.

**How is depression treated?** Mild depression often passes by itself after a period of time, but if your low mood persists, it is important that you get treatment for this.

Below are the components that are usually included in depression treatment at the health centre. Sometimes both elements are provided, sometimes just one. CBT stands for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which is a talking therapy.

*CBT* – during CBT you will learn about what depression is and what is causing your low mood. The treatment can sometimes consist of finding a balance between activities that *sap* energy and activities that *boost* energy, identifying and recording thoughts you have in everyday life, or learning how to deal with difficult feelings in a helpful way. The goal of CBT is for you to be able to recognise that what you do and how you react to your thoughts and feelings can affect your mood and so work to prevent a relapse.

*Medication* – the most commonly used medications for depression at present belong to a group called SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors). Common SSRIs are sertraline, citalopram and paroxetine.