

Depression

This leaflet has been given to you because you have been diagnosed with depression, or because you are suspected of suffering from depression.

[If you would rather read this information on your phone, you can go to www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/depression](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/depression) (in Danish) or scan the QR code with your phone.



What is depression?

Depression is one of the most common mental illnesses in Denmark. About 150,000 Danes suffer from some form of depression, and most recover completely. Depression comes in many degrees – from mild to severe depression, which may cause your daily life to grind to a complete standstill.

Depression can be a symptom of another mental or physical illness – for example an anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or diseases such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and blood clots/bleeding in the brain. It is therefore important that you get help early to rule out depression as a symptom of another illness.

The longer you wait before seeking help, the greater the risk of developing more depressive episodes, or more severe depression.

How many people suffer from depression?

- One in five Danes will develop depression at some point in their lives.
- Studies indicate that the risk of developing depression is about twice as great in women as in men. Perhaps because women are more likely to seek help than men.

Symptoms of depression

The symptoms of depression can vary from person to person. They are divided into core symptoms and accompanying symptoms. According to the official criteria, you must have at least two out of the three core symptoms to be said to suffer from depression. In addition, the symptoms must have been present for most of the time for two weeks.

However, there may be situations where you should seek help before two weeks are up, for example if you are severely depressed. When you seek help, your own family doctor can assess whether you suffer from depression or not.

Core symptoms:

- Low mood or sadness
- Having no motivation or interest in things that normally make you happy
- Low energy and/or feeling more tired than usual. Especially in the morning.

Accompanying symptoms:

- Altered sleep patterns: Difficulty sleeping, interrupted sleep and waking up early
- Reduced self-confidence or self-esteem
- Self-reproach or feeling of guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating
- Irritability/anger/physical agitation – or moving more slowly and generally being more passive
- Lack of appetite or overeating, causing you to either lose or gain weight.

Types of depression

The severity of depression can range from mild depression to very severe or even life-threatening depression. The vast majority of people suffering from depression – up to 80% – are treated by their own family doctor or private psychologist in the case of mild depression.

Depression can also be very serious, and in the worst case you can become so depressed that you start feeling that you are a burden on your surroundings and that the world would be a better place if you were not in it.

There are three main types of depression. If you are asked to fill out a form by your family doctor, these are the three types that they will distinguish between.

Mild depression

This is the most prevalent type of depression. With mild depression you can usually continue your normal everyday life – working, studying and engaging in leisure activities – although you may be sadder, introverted and quiet.

The vast majority are treated for mild depression by their family doctor, a private psychologist or a private psychiatrist.

Mild depression usually resolves itself over time. Sometimes changing your work routines, study habits or leisure-time activities is enough to make you feel better.

In other cases, therapy or medication may be needed.

Moderate depression

With moderate depression, it is difficult for you to lead a normal everyday life, working, studying and engaging in leisure-time activities. Many of the symptoms are the same as the symptoms of mild depression. In addition, you may also have difficulty falling asleep and sleeping.

Some people will find that they sleep more than usual.

Severe depression with or without psychotic symptoms

With severe depression, you feel so bad that it is hard for you to lead a normal life. You have difficulties remembering, concentrating and solving problems on your own. Your sleep is often interrupted at night, and you wake up early in the morning.

Many also have suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, self-blaming and a sense of inadequacy. These feelings are often worst in the morning, which makes it even more painful not to be able to sleep. In addition, it can be difficult to look after your daily needs for food, drink and hygiene.

Severe depression can also lead to other symptoms, such as hallucinations and delusions resulting in a distorted picture of reality.

Your symptoms may be so severe that you are unable to engage in your normal social life and activities. Severe depression can be life-threatening due to the risk of suicide.

Men and depression

The suicide rate among men suffering from depression is three times that of women, perhaps because they do not get help in time. Men may have a different way of expressing their depressive state, which may mean that fewer men than women are treated for depression.

Signs to look out for in a man:

- Drinking more alcohol
- More externalising behaviour and perhaps aggression
- Being introverted and antisocial compared to before
- Engaging in risk behaviours
- Low stress threshold
- Burying themselves in work.

Causes of depression

Depression is caused by a mix of our genetics, upbringing and current stresses. Genetics account for approximately 50% of the risk of developing depression. If you are genetically vulnerable, you are at an increased risk of developing depression if exposed to severe stress – for example being fired, subjected to abuse or something else.

There are many indications that depression is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. Sometimes the amounts of neurotransmitters in certain parts of the brain are too small. The neurotransmitters carry messages from one nerve cell to another.

Three substances play an important role in this context: serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine, affecting your mood, energy levels and anxiety levels. The medicines that work against depression (antidepressants) affect these chemical messengers in the brain.

Other factors that can trigger depression

Physical factors:

- Hormonal changes associated with pregnancy and childbirth.
- Brain diseases such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and blood clots/bleeding in the brain as well as Alzheimer's disease can also cause depression.

- Heart disease, arthritis and cancer can be a risk factor.
- Metabolic disorders.
- Certain types of medicines and drugs of abuse can lead to depression. For example, corticosteroids and beta-blockers (medicines for heart disease and high blood pressure), or alcohol.
- Lack of daylight, as light affects the formation and release of the neurotransmitter serotonin.

Social and psychological factors:

- A loss early in life, neglect, bullying, trauma
- Personality, low self-esteem, dependence on others
- Social problems, financial problems, divorce, disappointed expectations.

How long does depression last?

The duration of a depressive episode can vary considerably between individuals. The disease can progress slowly over several months or come on suddenly within a few days. Most people recover completely from depression, while about 10-30% are at risk of developing chronic depression.

Many people with depression relapse if untreated. Therefore, it is very important that you get treatment as early as possible instead of trying to cope with it yourself.

Duration

- Episodes of depression typically last 6-12 months if left untreated. But they can last up to several years or a lifetime.
- If you have developed depression once, your risk of having another depressive episode is about 60%. This can often be avoided through preventive medical treatment and therapy.
- A third of all severe depressions last more than two years.

Even long after having suffered a depressive episode, you may have symptoms such as fatigue, lack of energy, sleep disturbances or cognitive difficulties (problems with concentration, overview, initiative and memory).

If you suffer from recurrent depression, you may be completely symptom-free for extended periods between episodes.

More knowledge and counselling

Psykiatriguiden – overview for patients and relatives

In Psykiatriguiden, we have gathered all relevant information about mental illnesses, types of treatment and treatment programmes offered by the mental health services of the Capital Region of Denmark. You can also read about being a relative of a person with a mental illness.

[Find Psykiatriguiden \(in Danish\) at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykiatriguiden](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/psykiatriguiden) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Living with mental illness

[You can find specific tools designed to help you in your everyday life at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/hverdagen](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/hverdagen) (in Danish) or by scanning the QR code with your phone.



Counselling from PsykInfo

At PsykInfo in the Capital Region of Denmark, nurses with experience from the mental health services offer telephone or personal counselling to both patients and their relatives. [You can read more at www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/Psykinfo](http://www.psykiatri-regionh.dk/Psykinfo) (in Danish) or call 38 64 13 00. You can also scan the QR code with your phone.

