

COVID-19 and Depression

30th September 2020



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought many challenges with it, including a rapid increase of people suffering with depression. Some people may not have experienced mental health issues in the past and may feel uncertain about how to best cope. Others who experienced depression before the lockdown may have found that their depressive symptoms have been exacerbated.

Signs of depression

Common symptoms of depression include:

- a persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- a change in mood, irritability, or restlessness
- feelings of hopelessness or pessimism
- feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- a loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much

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- eating too much or too little
- fatigue or lack of energy
- persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain
- thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

If you find that you or a loved one are experiencing any of these symptoms, you or they may be experiencing depression.

Causes of depression during the COVID-19 pandemic

There are many factors brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic that can exacerbate mental health issues, including depression.

Job loss or furlough. Many people report that losing a job or being placed on furlough results in feeling devalued and adrift. You might also be mourning the loss of structure that a job brings, such as a regular schedule, or the social aspects of a workplace. You may also be experiencing increased anxiety about looking for a job or wondering if you'll be able to return to your job when furloughs end.

Financial stress. If you, your partner or a family member have lost their job and you're not sure what impact that's going to have on your future, money can be a huge stressor—especially if you're not sure if your industry will bounce back in the future.

Working from home. If your workplace has moved to remote working, you may find yourself missing colleagues, struggling to adjust to a new schedule, or feeling displaced as you adjust to your new circumstances. All of this can bring on undue stress to all areas of your life.

Social isolation. Feeling lonely is a huge contributor to depression. Lockdown and social distancing measures have created an additional challenge in making it difficult or sometimes impossible to socialise with other people in-person. Although the phone and computer can help you keep in touch, being isolated and separated from loved ones can lead to sad and lonely feelings.

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Caring for others. If you are a parent, your role may have changed overnight as you tried to juggle home-schooling and full-time childcare responsibilities without additional support. If you provide care for a loved one, you may have experienced additional stress at trying to support someone who is vulnerable and continues to need to isolate as protection against COVID-19.

Concern for family or loved ones. Even if you're not struggling, you might be stressed about the future of your family and loved ones, including when you'll be able to safely see them next.

Worry about the future. What will the world look like? Will there be future lockdowns? When will a vaccine be available? Unanswered questions about the future can leave you feeling unsure, leading to feelings of anxiety and depression.

Dealing with depression during the pandemic

It's important to remember that, while depression may be a challenge to get through, there is hope for those struggling with it. Remember that depression is a mental illness—and should be treated the way any other illness would. There is no shame in seeking treatment.

Finding professional help. A good place to start is having a conversation with your doctor. Describe the symptoms you've been experiencing and for how long. It might be helpful to write down everything you want to tell them beforehand.

Call your assistance program. If you need support for depression or other mental health issues, your caring counsellors are available to help you 24/7.

If you've already been diagnosed with depression, check in that you're doing what's been recommended. During the pandemic you might have fallen out of routines that help you cope. If you're not doing things you know have a positive impact on your mental health, get back into the habit of doing what you knew worked. If you're doing all of the things you're supposed to be doing, make an appointment with your doctor or therapist to discuss how to manage your depression through additional support, counselling, or medication if those options are appropriate for you.

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Remember that you are not alone. The social isolation and increased stress that the pandemic has brought with it can make it feel like you are alone in dealing with depressive feelings, however, many people are going through similar experiences. Support is available to help you cope.

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm, call 999 or go to your local A&E immediately. You can also call the Samaritans at 116 123.