Low mood, depression and epilepsy

Low mood and depression share some of the same signs and symptoms. They can have an impact on your epilepsy. And epilepsy can affect your mood too.

What is low mood?

Everybody feels down from time to time and this is quite normal. Low mood is not pleasant to live with. It can cause you to have feelings such as:

- Sadness
- Anxiety or panic
- Worry
- Tiredness
- Frustration
- Anger

How is low mood treated?

Making some small changes in your life, such as solving a difficult situation, talking to someone about your problems, or getting more sleep can help to improve your mood.1

Usually, low mood will tend to lift within a few days or weeks. If it lasts longer than that, and is affecting your day to day life, it could be that it has turned into depression.2

About depression

Around 1 in every 6 people in the UK will have depression.3 If you have epilepsy, your chance is around 1 in 3.4

Depression affects people in different ways but you might:5

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Feel sad or low for long periods of time
Feel hopeless or helpless
Feel guilty
Feel anxious or worried
Feel irritable
Feel tired all the time, with no energy
Sleep more or less than usual
Have no motivation or be unable to concentrate
Lose interest in things you normally enjoy
Lose interest in sex
Eat more or less than usual
Think about harming yourself or suicide

Are there any links between epilepsy and depression?

People with epilepsy are at a high risk of becoming depressed. And people with depression are at high risk of developing epilepsy. Although they are different conditions, it is thought that they might share a common cause.⁶

It's also interesting that some people who had depression before having temporal lobe surgery seem particularly vulnerable to depression and continuing seizures afterwards.⁷ The people who had epilepsy without a history of depression were more likely to become seizure free after surgery.⁸

Depression and thoughts of self-harm can be side-effects of some epilepsy medicines. This is particularly so if they are started at too high a dose, or the dose is increased too quickly.⁹ If you start having new symptoms after taking your epilepsy medicines, speak to your family doctor.

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What is the treatment for depression?

Depression can be mild, moderate or severe. Many people with mild depression will get better without any help. But some people will need some help, depending on how seriously their depression is affecting them. These are some of the ways your depression might be helped.

Self-help

- To avoid feeling isolated, stay connected to the people you care about
- Try to talk to people you trust about how your feel
- Try to have a regular good night's sleep
- Eat a balanced diet
- Try not to drink too much alcohol
- Try to get as much exercise as you can. Exercise releases chemicals called endorphins into your body. These are natural antidepressants

Epilepsy Action has an epilepsy and wellbeing online course you might like to try.

You can find more information about self-help treatments on the NHS choices and NICE websites.

Talking therapies

There are various different types of talking therapy that can help with depression. They all involve talking with a therapist. Some people will see a therapist by themselves, and some will join a group therapy session.

This is an NHS Choices video about talking therapies.

Antidepressants

Treatment with anti-depressant medicines should be considered for people with epilepsy and depression. These work by increasing the activity and levels of certain chemicals in the brain.

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that help to lift a person’s mood.\textsuperscript{12} The choice of anti-depressant medicine will depend on what epilepsy medicines you are taking and any possible interactions.\textsuperscript{13}

St John’s Wort can interact with some epilepsy medicines, so people with epilepsy shouldn’t use it.

For some people, a combination of self-help, talking therapies and medicine is the most effective way of treating depression.\textsuperscript{14}

See this Royal College of Psychiatrist’s video about depression.

**Coming to terms with epilepsy and depression**

You are more likely to develop conditions like depression than someone who doesn’t have epilepsy.\textsuperscript{15} But, treatment can help. And trying to look after your emotional health and wellbeing can be a help too.

Our bodies and minds are connected. Being diagnosed and living with epilepsy can affect how we feel emotionally. And how we feel emotionally can affect the way we cope with our day-to-day lives.

You can find out more about taking control of your epilepsy by taking part in Epilepsy Action’s epilepsy and you online training course.

**Who can help?**

We all need help sometimes. If the negative feelings you are having don’t go away, or they are affecting your everyday life, you might need some support. You could get this from a family member, a friend, your family doctor, epilepsy specialist or epilepsy nurse.

If you are feeling that life is too much, you will need help straight away.

Seek medical advice or call NHS 111.

\textsuperscript{14} National Centre for Mental Health (2015) Depression [online] Available at http://ncmh.info/conditions/depression [Accessed 12 July 2016].
You can also contact the Samaritans. They offer 24 hour confidential emotional support for people who are having feelings of distress or despair, including thinking about suicide.

**The Samaritans**  
Tel: 116 123  
Website: [samaritans.org](http://samaritans.org)

For information about psychological services in your area visit [NHS Choices](http://nhs.uk).

**Organisations for information and support**

Telephone numbers for the UK only

**Mind**  
Helps people to take control over their mental health. They offer advice and support.  
Tel: 0300 123 3393  
Website: [mind.org.uk](http://mind.org.uk)

**NHS choices website**  
The country’s biggest health website and gives information you need to make choices about your health.  
Website: [nhs.uk](http://nhs.uk)

**Rethink Mental Illness**  
Provides expert, accredited advice and information to everyone affected by mental health problem.  
Tel: 0300 5000 927  
Website: [rethink.org](http://rethink.org)

**Royal College of Psychiatrists**  
Provides a detailed patient information leaflet about depression in several languages. Search ‘depression’ from the homepage.  
Website: [rcpsych.ac.uk](http://rcpsych.ac.uk)

**Saneline**  
National out-of-hours telephone helpline, offering emotional support and information for people affected by mental health problems.  
Tel: 0300 304 7000  
Website: [sane.org.uk](http://sane.org.uk)
About this information
This information is written by Epilepsy Action’s advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy, and medical experts. If there is anything you would like to say about the information, please contact us at epilepsy.org.uk/feedback

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

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Your support
We hope you have found this information helpful. As a charity, we rely on donations to provide our advice and information. If you would like to make a donation, here are some ways you can do this.

- Visit www.epilepsy.org.uk/donate
- Text ACT NOW to 70700 (This will cost you £5 plus your usual cost of sending a text. Epilepsy Action will receive £5.)
- Send a cheque payable to Epilepsy Action to the address below.

Did you know you can also become a member of Epilepsy Action from as little as £1 a month? To find out more, visit epilepsy.org.uk/join or call 0113 210 8800.

Epilepsy Helpline
Freephone 0808 800 5050, text 0753 741 0044, email helpline@epilepsy.org.uk, tweet @epilepsyadvice

Contact details
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