

# Depression and low mood

Living with a brain tumour



Around 1 in 5 people in the UK suffer from depression at some point in their lives.

It's important to remember that depression is not a sign of weakness and is nothing to be ashamed of.

Like many physical conditions, depression is an illness which can usually be managed or treated, if dealt with appropriately.



CARE CAN'T WAIT

If you'd like to talk to someone about how you're feeling, or would like to find out where you can get further support (including details of support groups), you can contact The Brain Tumour Charity's Information and Support Team:

Phone: **0808 800 0004**

(free from landlines and most mobiles)

Email: [support@thebraintumourcharity.org](mailto:support@thebraintumourcharity.org)

Live chat: [thebraintumourcharity.org/live-chat](https://thebraintumourcharity.org/live-chat)

Website: [thebraintumourcharity.org/getsupport](https://thebraintumourcharity.org/getsupport)

Closed Facebook groups:

[thebraintumourcharity.org/facebook-support](https://thebraintumourcharity.org/facebook-support)

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# Introduction

A brain tumour diagnosis is a major life event, which can have a significant effect on your mood and emotional wellbeing.

If you, or someone close to you, is living with a brain tumour, it's very natural to have moments when you feel distressed or overwhelmed and in low spirits.

But in some cases, these feelings can be more severe and linger on for weeks and months. This could be a sign of depression.

These are very natural reactions to being diagnosed with a brain tumour and coping with its impact. This fact sheet gives information about these changes in mood.

It also looks at how you can tell the difference between low mood and depression, and when you may need to get professional support.

Our associated fact sheet **Coping with depression and low mood** has suggestions for ways of coping with low mood or depression, how to access support, and the possible treatment options available.

**[thebraintumourcharity.org/coping-with-depression/](http://thebraintumourcharity.org/coping-with-depression/)**

# What's the difference between low mood and depression?

## What is low mood?

We all have times when our mood is low. Any stressful event, such as difficulties at work, bereavement, relationship or financial issues, sleep problems and illness, can leave us feeling down, often due to a feeling of lack of control over our situation.

A low mood can include:

- sadness
- feeling anxious or panicky
- worry
- tiredness
- low self-esteem
- frustration
- anger.

With low moods, these feelings don't usually prevent you from carrying out your daily activities, though they can make them harder to do and seem less worthwhile.

Making small changes to your life, to sort out some of what is stressing you, can help to improve your mood. This could be talking to someone about your problems, or just getting some more sleep.

Low moods usually pass over time - often lifting after a few days.

However, if a low mood doesn't go away, this can be a sign of depression.

## **What is depression?**

Depression is a low mood that lasts for a long time **and** affects your daily life. It often involves deeper, more unpleasant periods of unhappiness.

Depression can range from feeling relatively low for a number of weeks with no interest in what you usually enjoy (mild depression), to having persistent negative thoughts and finding it mentally and physically difficult to take part in your usual daily activities (moderate to severe depression).

If you or a loved one are affected by a brain tumour, are feeling overwhelmed and would like to call someone, call your GP. Or you can call The Brain Tumour Charity's Information and Support Line on:

0808 800 0004 (Mon - Fri, 09:00 - 17:00)

Email: [\*\*support@thebraintumourcharity.org\*\*](mailto:support@thebraintumourcharity.org)

If you need someone to talk to outside office hours, you can call the Samaritans on 116 123.

# What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

Symptoms of depression may vary from person to person, but can include:

- low mood for most of the day
- low mood for 2 or more weeks
- feeling fatigued or lacking in energy
- losing interest in the things you used to enjoy
- feeling overly emotional or lacking emotion (apathy)
- having difficulty focusing on tasks (concentrating) or making decisions
- being unusually anxious, irritable or agitated
- sleeping for longer than usual, or having difficulty falling asleep
- changes in appetite (eating less or eating more)
- feeling less affectionate towards other people
- having persistent negative thoughts.

(This can range from expecting the worst in certain situations to a sense of hopelessness, or thoughts about death or suicide.)

## When do I need to get help for low mood or depression?

If your feelings are relatively mild, you may be able to self-help by making a few changes. For support with this, see our **Coping with depression or low mood** webpage and fact sheet. [thebraintumourcharity.org/coping-with-depression/](http://thebraintumourcharity.org/coping-with-depression/)

But you may need professional help or support if your low mood or negative feelings:

- don't go away (last for more than a couple of weeks)
- are preventing you from carrying on with your normal daily activities
- are becoming too much to cope with.

Depression can affect each person differently. However, most people with depression suffer from more than one of the signs and symptoms listed on the previous page.

If you think you might be depressed, speak to your GP for advice or call NHS 111.

The NHS has a mood assessment quiz, based on questions that GPs often ask to assess if someone is depressed or anxious. You could take a print-out of your results to your appointment with your GP to start the discussion and get the help you need.

[nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mood-self-assessment/](http://nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mood-self-assessment/)



# Why am I feeling low or depressed?

A brain tumour diagnosis can affect a person in a number of ways that could potentially lead to some form of low mood or depression.

## **Through the shock of receiving a diagnosis**

Receiving a diagnosis of a brain tumour can be devastating. Your expectations, your way of life and your reality, can be threatened instantly. You can go from feeling mentally secure and content with life to feeling fearful and uncertain.

Experiencing such feelings is natural following a brain tumour diagnosis and, in some people, can contribute to the onset of depression.

## **Through a tumour's effect on the brain**

The brain controls all aspects of our personality. In some cases, a growing tumour can press against the parts of the brain that regulate mood, causing unusual mood swings and, in some cases, depression.

## **By affecting your quality of life**

A brain tumour can cause some forms of physical or cognitive disability, which can limit what you're able to do and how you socialise.

For example, if you have difficulty moving around due to a brain tumour, you may leave the house less than you used to, or be unable to do the physical activities you used to enjoy before your diagnosis.

It may be that you're no longer able to work, so your finances are affected. This can obviously cause much stress, leading to low mood or depression.

Or you could be suffering from fatigue (extreme tiredness), with everything becoming an effort and the natural effect on your mood.



## What else can cause depression?

There is no one cause for depression, but several factors have been found to increase the chance of developing depression. These include:

- having had depression in the past
- having a family history of depression
- not having other people to talk to
- having to deal with a lot of difficult situations at once
- taking certain medication which increases the chance of developing depression.

## Low mood and depression in family and friends

Depression can affect the person with a brain tumour and also those who care for them.

If you're caring for someone with a brain tumour, you may have a lot less time to spend on yourself, seeing friends and doing the things you used to enjoy. You may also have to give up work for a period of time. These would be major changes in anyone's life, affecting their emotional wellbeing in the short or long term.

For more help and support, see our Being a carer webpage and fact sheet [thebraintumourcharity/being-a-carer/](https://www.thebraintumourcharity.org.uk/being-a-carer/) and other relevant fact sheets at [bit.ly/LivingWithaBT](https://bit.ly/LivingWithaBT)

# About this information resource

All of our information is produced using robust processes, which follow best practice and quality guidelines of health information production, to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Written and edited by our experienced Information and Support Team, the accuracy of medical or other specialist information in this resource has been verified by leading professionals specialising in relevant areas of expertise.

Our information resources have been produced with up-to-date, reliable sources of evidence, as well as the assistance of members of our community, to make sure it makes sense to everyone and includes the information they want to see.

We hope that this information will complement the medical or social care advice you've already been given. Please do continue to talk to your healthcare team if you're worried about any medical issues.

If you'd like a list of references for any of our information resources, or would like more information about how we produce them, please contact us.

We welcome your comments on this information resource, so we can improve. Please give us your feedback via our Information and Support Team on 0808 800 0004 or [support@thebraintumourcharity.org](mailto:support@thebraintumourcharity.org)

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## About The Brain Tumour Charity

### Going further for a cure

As the UK's leading brain tumour charity, we're here to accelerate a positive change in how people affected by brain tumours are diagnosed, supported and cured.

At The Brain Tumour Charity, we believe that no-one should have to live with a brain tumour or lose a loved one to a brain tumour. Advances in both treatments and quality of life care need to be made - and they need to be made quickly.

We know that if we put our heads together, we're more than up to the challenge. So we're building a movement of people from every walk of life - all coming together to accelerate a cure.

Find out more and get involved:  
[thebraintumourcharity.org](http://thebraintumourcharity.org)







**WE'RE  
HERE FOR YOU  
AT EVERY STEP**

[thebraintumourcharity.org](https://thebraintumourcharity.org)

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