

COPING WITH HIS DEPRESSION

SOURCE: BY SUSAN QUILLIAM

Your partner's in a mood again.
But how do you cope when the
days off become weeks, months,
or even years?

Each year, one in four adults suffer from significant depression, and an increasing number of these are men. Emotionally, they may feel bad about themselves and as a result, be anxious, angry, and panicky. Physically, they may suffer from eating problems, insomnia, feel unable to work, lose all interest in making love. All this isn't terrible just for the depressed person - it's also hard for their partners. So, what should you do if your partner suffers from depression?

First steps. First you must be aware of what's happening. Depression can be hard to spot, and men put on a brave face. If you notice any of the following symptoms, something's going wrong:

- 🗣️ He makes 'put down' comments that show he feels bad about himself and his life.
- 🗣️ He sleeps or eats more or less than usual.
- 🗣️ He drinks or takes drugs more than usual.
- 🗣️ He's angry, irritable, nervous, tearful.
- 🗣️ He has no energy, fails to go to work finds it difficult to interact.
- 🗣️ He lets himself go, his personal hygiene slips.
- 🗣️ He makes catastrophes out of trivial situations - has a doom-and-gloom philosophy.

How should you react to these cries for help? Simply listen and keep listening. While it's tempting to give advice, or tell your partner to pull himself together, this won't give him the support he needs. That itself could be enough to lift mild depression.

Second support. But if your partner's been down for more than two weeks - particularly after a life problem like a job loss, failed exam, bereavement, or illness - then you need to worry. And he needs to get help.

If he holds back or seems unwilling to get help, you need to give him a gentle push.

Nagging, putting on pressure, and emotional blackmail are not effective tactics.

What will work, particularly for a man, is to treat the whole thing as a problem that has a solution.

Point out that depression is an illness and that it is usually curable through medication and/or counselling. The first port of call is his GP - offer to go with him if that will help or suggest he call a depression support organization.

Even with support, it takes a while to recover from depression. **It is easy to be irritable with a depressed partner, but, if possible, do not try to argue with him out of his depression.** He is already feeling bad about himself and blaming him will make him feel worse.

Instead, point out when he's doing well - when he has energy to go out, speaks positively about the future, starts making



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plans. Rewarding him when he takes positive steps will aid his recovery much better than telling him to pull himself together.

Serious depression. Occasionally, depression turns serious, and the sufferer can become prone to self-harm and suicide. If so, you need to get help urgently.

Your partner may resist help. He may insist he does not want anyone to know that he is desperate or suicidal. And then you must decide whether to get help anyway.

In this situation there are two main approaches you can use. Either insist he see your GP or ask them to make a house call. Alternatively ring a Crisis Unit who is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They will support you and talk to your partner if he's willing to speak to them.

Look after yourself. Up to now, we have dealt with how to help your partner. But it is also vital to help yourself, especially since recent research suggests depression is actually 'catching'. You pick up emotions from the one you love - so if he is down, you too can start to feel down. You may also feel burned out by having to support him practically and emotionally. And a symptom of his depression may have been anger - and that anger may have been channeled towards you.

Plus, you may blame yourself, feeling that if you had loved and looked after him more, he would not have become ill. In fact, there's no truth in this - your partner's depression is not your fault. You can help. But you're not to blame if that help doesn't work or isn't accepted.

But all this means you must get support for yourself. Naturally you feel frustrated and helpless - so make sure you have someone to listen to you occasionally. And **don't neglect your needs** - make sure you are getting enough rest, having a social life, getting some fun, and taking time out for yourself.

Finally. Remember that yes, some kinds of depression last a long time. But most people who get depressed recover quickly. And typically, if you and your partner can get through a first bout of depression, that's usually the worst. It gets easier from then on.

