



SUFFERING FROM

LOW MOOD

Explains what self-harm is, possible reasons people self-harm, ways you can manage self-harm as well as some useful exercises, what to do if someone you know is self-harming & apps and websites for more support.

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What is low mood?

Explains what self-harm is, possible reasons people self-harm, ways you can manage self-harm as well as some useful exercises, what to do if someone you know is self-harming & apps and websites for more support.

How is this different from depression?

Depression is a medical diagnosis categorised as a low mood that lasts for a long time and affects your everyday life. We all experience low mood but if the feelings are interfering with your life or are persistent and don't go away after 2 weeks, this could be a sign of depression and would be good to see your GP for more information and further help.

Signs of low mood

Feeling low may cause someone to stop doing the things they like as well as feel a range of emotions some of the things below are some common examples.

How you might feel:

- Down/upset or tearful
- Restless
- Empty and numb
- Isolated
- Feeling low about your worth or confidence
- Tired
- Worried and/or anxious

How you might behave:

- Not feeling like taking part in usual social events
- Self-harming (see our booklet on self-harm for help with this)
- Feeling indecisive or unable to think clearly
- Sleep problem e.g., can't sleep at all, disrupted sleep, or sleeping too much
- No appetite or overeating
- Moving slowly due to feeling restless

What can cause low mood?

here are several things that can cause low mood, it can really vary from person to person on what makes them feel low. For some people it can be one specific thing and for others it might be a combination of different factors. Sometimes you may feel low for no obvious reason. Below are some of the common causes of low mood.

- 1. Traumatic experiences in the past:** If you have experienced trauma in childhood you may suffer from low mood later on in life. Some common traumatic experiences might have been abuse, neglect, bullying or experiencing a bereavement as a child could be the cause of your sadness. Difficult experiences during your childhood can have a big impact on your self-esteem and how you learned to cope with difficult emotions and situations. This can make you feel less able to cope with life's ups and downs, and lead to more periods of low mood.
- 2. Stressful circumstances in the present:** Low mood can be caused by stressful events that are going on right now. Going through a big change e.g. parents separation, moving house, changing your job. Losing a loved one, dealing with bullying or abuse and the end of a relationship can be other factors causing your low mood.
- 3. Dealing with other mental health problems:** If you are struggling with another mental health problem, it is common for you to also experience some low mood. This might be because you are finding it hard to cope with the symptoms of your other mental health problems. Some examples are if you struggle with anxiety, eating problems, panic low mood is a common other symptom.
- 4. Other health conditions:** Feeling anxious or stressed is known to contribute to low mood. This may make you more susceptible to low mood periods if you are dealing with a physical condition especially if you are dealing with a long-term illness that impacts on your daily life and/or is life threatening. Low mood can also be exacerbated by a lack of sleep, low blood sugar and hormonal changes that might be being brought about by certain prescriptive medications you are on.
- 5. Lifestyle:** A poor diet, lack of exercise and sleep can affect your mood and make it harder for you to be able to deal with stressful life events. Alcohol and recreational drugs can both lead to periods of low mood. Although you may use them to make yourself feel better, dealing with the lows can make your low mood even worse.

***It's important to not always fixate on what has caused your low mood as there might not always be a reason. ***

What can you do to help your low mood?

Talking to someone you trust

If you feel you have someone in your life that you trust and can always talk to, reach out to them when you are suffering with low mood. It might feel weird at first and it can be hard to talk about how we are feeling but once you get used to it sharing your experience can sometimes help you feel better. This person could be a friend or family member or if you feel you don't have anyone in your life you'd like to talk to about your mood you can always speak to a professional, the Samaritans run a 24hr helpline that you can call whenever and talk about how you're feeling confidentially.

Try Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of getting yourself back into the present. Mindfulness practises can help manage your feelings and thoughts leading to an improved mental wellbeing. Examples of mindfulness practises you could try including:

Meditation: *This is a mindfulness technique which is like a daily massage for the mind. Mindfulness meditation normally involves sitting silently and paying attention to thoughts, sounds, the sensations of breathing or parts of the body, bringing your attention back whenever the mind starts to wander of focus on negative thoughts.*

Look after your physical health

A poor diet, lack of exercise and sleep can affect your mood and make it harder for you to be able to deal with stressful life events so its important to look after yourself.

Try to get good sleep: Sleeping too much or too little can be common when you're feeling low. Getting into a good sleeping pattern can help improve your mood by increasing your energy levels. See our booklet on sleep for tips.

Sticking to a healthy diet: Eating regularly and keeping your sugar levels stable will make a difference to your mood. If you are experiencing some problems with food see our booklet on Food issues for help with this. It's also important to avoid recreational drugs and alcohol, although you may lean towards these to cope with difficult feelings, in the long run they can make your low periods worse and/or last longer.

Try and do something active: Exercise is a great way to increase your endorphins and improve your mood. This doesn't have to be strenuous activity, you could try walking, running, swimming or yoga something gentler could still give you a boost to your mood.

What can you do to help your low mood?

Keep a mood diary

Keeping a diary can help you keep track of your feelings and specifically any changes in your mood you might have noticed. This might highlight that you have more good days than you think, it may also help you recognise certain activities, places, or people that make you feel better or worse.

Practise self-care

Taking time out to look after yourself, by just doing something you enjoy/makes you feel good can help improve your low mood and your quality of life. Self-care is really personal but some ideas of things you could do when feeling low are:

1. Listen to your favourite song
2. Paint or draw
3. Comfort food
4. Make your bed, fresh sheets
5. Get creative, make something
6. Take a long shower/bath
7. Meditate
8. Spend some time in nature/go for a walk
9. Cook/bake something as a treat
10. Write out your thoughts

Make a self-soothe box

If you often have repeated feelings of low mood a self-soothe or mood box is a great way to manage those feelings and help you feel more relaxed. It's something you can get out and focus on when you're feeling low.

Each self-soothe box can be different and filled with things that are relevant to the individual and make you feel more positive. Some ideas of where to start are to focus on having a range of sensory things in the box to enable you to focus your mind on. You could include something you like the smell of or a smell that is calming, a popular choice is lavender. Something you could touch, examples could either be something soft and soothing to feel comforted or something to use for stress relief like a stress ball. Something you can look at this could be a photograph, an old toy a book or poem something that brings you joy and makes you feel calm and so on. Something to hear could be a favourite CD or DVD.

The things that go into the box must help to change your mood when you are feeling low, tense or overwhelmed.

How to deal with negative thoughts

If you suffer from having negative or sometimes intrusive thoughts when you're experiencing your low mood its important to be able to manage these if you want to be able to increase your mood.

Some examples of common negative thoughts:

"I can't get things together."

"I hate myself."

"I'm worthless."

"Wish I could just disappear."

"What's the matter with me?"

"I'm a loser."

"My life is a mess."

"I'm a failure."

"I'll never make it."

"I feel so helpless."

"I look awful."

"There must be something wrong with me."

"My future is bleak."

"I can't do anything."

Distract

If your negative thoughts are getting overwhelming and are about your harming yourself. Try some self-harm techniques and distractions- if you need some help with this, take a look at our pages on self-harm but some quick examples could be: -

- Tearing something up/breaking things apart e.g., tearing paper, knocking over Lego.
- Hold an ice cube against where you normally self-harm e.g., on your wrist, thigh, upper arm.

Try and get yourself to do an activity that will keep you distracted this can be something small like listening to music or putting the tv on or you can go for a walk/run and get yourself outside- feeling the change in temperature, a breeze or the warmth from the sun can help if you are feeling numb.

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Focus on your breathing and your senses.

This can help you focus on your now and your surrounds and try and keep you calm, especially if you have started to feel panicked by your negative thoughts. To focus on your breathing try a relaxation breathing exercise and to focus on your senses try the grounding five senses technique:

- **4-7-8 Breathing**
 - 1. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
 - 2. Hold your **breath** for a count of seven.
 - 3. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
 - 4. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four **breaths**.
- **The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding Technique Take a deep breath and...**
 - 1. Acknowledge **five things** that **you can see around you**.
 - 2. Acknowledge **four things** that **you can touch around you**.
 - 3. Acknowledge **three things you can hear around you**.
 - 4. Acknowledge **two things** around **you that you can smell**.
 - 5. Acknowledge **one thing** around **you that you can taste**.



How to deal with negative thoughts

Challenge your thoughts

Having negative thoughts can be very overwhelming and hard to distract yourself from but it is important to try. One way to do this is to list either physically or in your head positive things. These can be things you are looking forward to big or small, make some plans for something to do later on, later on can be the same day or later on in the week, think of happy memories in the past or a time when you were having fun.

Encourage yourself, tell yourself that you can get through this. If you suffer from regular fleeting negative thoughts remind yourself that these thoughts don't last, and you have gotten through them before.

You can also try talking to yourself as if you are talking to a friend, and what you would say to them if they were feeling this way. Try and be kind to yourself, treat yourself e.g., stop working and cosy up or run yourself a nice bath.

Useful apps and resources

Websites

My CAMHS choices Website: For young people who have been referred to CAMHS or are interested in finding out about it (site created by young people) www.mycamhschoices.org

Mind: The charity Mind advise and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. www.mind.org.uk

Kooth: Online support/articles/resources. <https://www.kooth.com/>

Samaritans: Samaritans is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. 116 123. <https://www.samaritans.org/>

The Mix: Support under 25/online/articles/app/. <https://www.themix.org.uk/>

Sofa Project: <https://www.sofaproject.org.uk/about-us>

Young Minds: Helps to improve the emotional well-being and mental health of young people. www.youngminds.org.uk. Young Minds run a site for information about mental health medications. www.headmeds.org.uk

Apps

Headspace: Meditation and Sleep Made Simple - Meditation and mindfulness for any mind, any mood, any goal - For accessibility options click on the person in the wheelchair in the bottom right corner (Desktop/Laptop) - If your a student (College/University) with Spotify Student you can get Headspace Premium for free with your Spotify subscription with the total cost being only £4.99 (<https://www.spotify.com/uk/headspace/student/>)

Kooth app: XenZone | Future Thinking for Mental Health - Kooth.com is commissioned by the NHS, Local Authorities, charities and businesses to provide anonymous and personalised mental health support for Children and Young People. - With over 4000 logins per day, we provide end to end support whatever the need.

Mindful Gnats: An app to help young people develop mindfulness and relaxation skills.

MindShift:

- MindShift is a free app designed to help teens and young adults cope with anxiety.
- It can help you change how you think about anxiety.
- Rather than trying to avoid anxiety, you can make an important shift and face it. Lists symptoms of anxiety.
- Offers strategies to manage worry, panic, conflict, ordinary anxiety, and three specialised categories of anxiety: test anxiety, social anxiety, and perfectionism.
- Also contains relaxation exercises.

Mood Tracker:

A website/app which lets you track moods and sleep patterns helping to manage depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder.

MoodGYM:

- MoodGYM is a free, fun, interactive program to help young people with low mood. - Based on cognitive behaviour and interpersonal therapy, it consists of five modules, which help you to explore:
 - Why you feel the way you do
 - Changing the way you think
 - Knowing what makes you upset
 - Assertiveness and interpersonal skills training