

Depression & Adjustment Disorders

The current COVID-19 pandemic and the associated consequences can carry a psychological burden.

To a certain extent, an emotional reaction to the current situation is natural and does not require any intervention.

The differentiation between a pathological and natural reaction is not easy. However, as soon as your condition or your performance suffers greatly, you should take it seriously.



Depression? Adjustment Disorders?

If a person feels strongly pressured or emotionally impaired by a one-time or ongoing stressful event, a so-called **adjustment disorder** may be possible.

Often this can cause difficulties in contact with other people or a strong decrease of performance in everyday life. It is assumed that the disorder would not have occurred without the occurrence of a certain event.

An untreated and prolonged adjustment disorder can lead to **depression**. It is estimated that up to 20% of all people develop depression at some point in their life. Therefore, it is a common disease (Lieb & Frauenknecht, 2019).

A common explanatory model states that depression leads to distorted thinking patterns, such as inappropriate generalizations, black-and-white thinking or the negative interpretation of social experiences. These thinking patterns influence our feelings and thus our behaviour and actions (Lieb & Frauenknecht, 2019).



Pandemic and depressive mood?

What special features of the COVID-19 pandemic can cause depressive mood?

- Professional and financial uncertainty
- Excessive preoccupation with COVID-19 problems
- Fear of an illness of one's own
- Worries about family members
- Neglecting the separation of work and rest phases
- Social isolation due to the „physical distancing“ instructions
- Loss of control and helplessness
- Compliance with rules that do not correspond to your own lifestyle
- Temporal uncertainty about the current state
- General uncertainty



How do I recognize depression?

As a rule, the following symptoms in different intensity and combinations of depression requiring treatment will have been present for at least two weeks ([ICD-10 classification](#)):

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest
- Joylessness
- Lack of energy
- Increased fatigue
- Daily fluctuations (morning low)
- Decreased concentration and attention
- Pondering / circles of thought
- Slow and uninspired thinking
- Inner unrest
- Sleep disorders
- Irritability
- Reduced appetite
- Decreased sexual desire
- Feeling guilty and worthless
- Decreased self-esteem and self-confidence
- Hopelessness
- (recurring) suicidal thoughts or the desire to die

What can I do about a depressed mood?

A depressive mood is currently affecting a lot of people. The following recommendations can help:

- Regular exercise and walks in the fresh air (in accordance with current regulations) (Kvam, Kleppe, Nordhus, & Hovland, 2016).
- A balanced diet and healthy sleep (see leaflet on sleep).
- Avoid trying to improve your depressed mood with drugs or alcohol.
- You can carry out regular relaxation or meditation exercises to distance yourself from stressful thoughts (see leaflet on imagination, PMR, breathing exercises).
- Distract yourself with a new leisure activity or dedicate yourself again to previous hobbies (see leaflet stayhome).
- Try not to mix working hours with private leisure.
- Share your concerns with a friend or family member. You will see that other people have some of your concerns as well and an exchange about them can be very helpful.
- Avoid further distancing yourself socially. Stay in touch with family, friends or work colleagues on a regular basis.
- If you tend to ponder or ruminate, it can be helpful to write these thoughts down in a notebook. This may help you to obtain some distance. If you re-read these thoughts after a day or two, try to validate the content. Do the thoughts match reality and your experiences?
- Could it be different? Try to reformulate these thoughts into non-judgmental sentences.
- Write down future plans you are aiming for during and after the pandemic.

You are not alone!

Always keep in mind that you are not alone in the current situation and that the measures taken are aimed at returning to normal.

Consult a Specialist

If the symptoms of depression persist for a longer period of time, depressive or other symptoms appear more intensely or you suffer from suicidal thoughts, we advise you to **consult a specialist immediately** (see leaflet “Mental Health Support”). Depression can be treated, but should be taken seriously.

References and Resources

- Dilling, H., & Freyberger, H. (2019). *Taschenführer zur ICD-10-Klassifikation psychischer Störungen*: Hogrefe.
- Kvam, S., Kleppe, C. L., Nordhus, I. H., & Hovland, A. (2016). *Exercise as a treatment for depression: A meta-analysis*. *J Affect Disord*, 202, 67-86.
- Lieb, K., & Frauenknecht, S. (2019). *Intensivkurs Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie*: Elsevier, Urban & Fischer. ([Available at ETH library.](#))

Any Questions?

If you have further questions, please see the contact details for mental health support that are listed in our leaflet „[Mental Health Support](#)“, as well as the references and links in this document. Please note that while we select links to external websites carefully, we cannot guarantee for the accuracy or quality of these websites.