

Depression in kidney patients

What is depression?

Depression is a word used to describe feelings of low mood. Everybody will at some point in their life feel down, low or fed up, but when people develop persistent symptoms of low mood that are pervasive, or interfere with their lives they may have depression. Other features of depression include:

- Persistent negative thinking or feelings of hopelessness
- Losing interest or enjoyment in things that used to be enjoyable or fun
- Lacking motivation and energy
- Not wanting to be around others
- Have changes in sleep (can be increased or decreased) and appetite
- Poor concentration.

At times people can feel so low and desperate that they may think of taking their life. If you ever feel like this you need to talk to someone (e.g. a doctor or nurse), as there is help available.

How common is it?

It is not at all unusual for kidney patients to experience some episodes of low mood or depression, and up to one in three patients with kidney disease will experience depression at some point. This is more common than in the population in general.

When you first become ill, there is a lot to think about: changes in health, worries about the future, changes in lifestyle, work, finances – and also how you view yourself. It can take a while for people to come to terms with what has happened.

Sadness can be a stage that some people experience and clearly different individuals will deal with it in different ways. It is, however, a normal reaction and often nothing to be worried about unless it lasts for longer than a few weeks, or significantly interferes with your life.

When does it happen?

For renal patients there are different stages of ill health, including:

- When you are first told about your kidney problems
- When you start on dialysis
- When you have a transplant.

Things, unfortunately, can go wrong along the way and patients may go through several bad patches and experience feelings of low mood during these times.

How can I help myself?

One of the ways you can help yourself is to become more active. Often when people are depressed they lose their 'get-up-and-go'. The less you do, the worse you feel; and although it might be difficult, staying active can boost energy levels and mood. Setting yourself one thing to do each day, even if it is only a walk to your local shop, can help lift your mood, as can making a routine. Doing things with other people can also be helpful, as can letting friends and family know how you feel. They may be able to help or simply share some of your worries.

Another way to help yourself is to notice some of the negative things you are telling yourself, that might get you down. People tend to say things like, 'It's all my fault,' or 'I feel like a burden.' Try to avoid saying these things: it is probably not your fault, and people do not consider you a burden. Instead, ask yourself: 'How do I know what I am telling myself is true? Does it help me to think like this?'

Seeking help

Sometimes people need help to move forward. Your local renal unit should have ways of supporting you, such as patient support groups, or a counsellor or a psychologist. If your unit does not have these types of services, ask why not and what can be done about it. If you are having difficulty getting the help you need through your renal unit, your GP should also be able to help and refer you.



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