

Mind Your Head, Mind Your Heart  
**Cardiovascular Disease  
& Depression**



**CR**  **Í**

*Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke*

## Cardiovascular Disease and Depression

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The term cardiovascular disease (CVD) refers to diseases of the heart and circulation system. The most common forms of CVD are those affecting the coronary arteries in the heart such as angina (chest pain) and heart attack, and those affecting the blood supply to the brain such as stroke. Living with cardiovascular disease can be very difficult. At times, you may feel unsure of what to expect or limited by tiredness and pain, and this may cause feelings like **sadness** and **hopelessness**.

Going through periods of sadness is normal and this should improve gradually as you start to feel better and get back to your normal routine. **If symptoms such as feelings of sadness, low energy, physical aches, and changes to your normal sleeping pattern last longer than a couple of weeks, you may be experiencing depression.**

It is normal to feel down or depressed after a cardiac event like a heart attack, a heart surgery or procedure, or a new diagnosis of cardiovascular disease.

Many people with CVD will experience psychological distress, particularly depression. With support and treatment, it is possible to recover from depression and take care of your heart health.

## What is depression?

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Depression is a mental health condition which can be mild or more severe. It can affect the way you think, feel and behave, impacting life, work and relationships. A range of factors can cause depression such as your family history, high levels of stress, or imbalances in chemicals in the body that control your mood. Among people with CVD, those who have never had depression can become depressed, and people who have experienced depression before getting CVD can experience it again.

Dealing with depression is very challenging and distressing and it can increase the difficulty of living with CVD. Depression can also have an impact on your heart health. If you are living with CVD, it is very important to be on the lookout for signs of depression and to talk to your GP if you have any concerns.

## How might depression affect me?

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Each individual will experience depression a bit differently. Depression has eight main symptoms:

- **Feeling sad**, anxious or irritable
- Low **energy** or fatigue
- **Sleep** more or less than normal
- Trouble **thinking** and concentrating
- Less **interest** in family, socialising and pastimes
- Placing less **value** on yourself
- Physical **aches** and pains that do not seem related to your CVD
- Loss of joy for **life**, thoughts of death or suicide

## What action can I take?

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As a person living with CVD, there are important steps you can take to avoid depression, while also helping you to recover from a cardiac event or procedure:

### **Understanding your heart health:**

It can be hard to understand what is going on if you are having trouble with your heart. For example, if you have had a heart attack, or received a new diagnosis, you will have a lot of questions and concerns. Asking questions to your health care providers and seeking information from groups like Croí can support you to understand and may help to reduce worry and fear.



### **Engage with your support system:**

It can be helpful to ask the people around you to keep an eye out for any signs that you are feeling down. If family and friends notice that your mood is often low and you are not enjoying things the way you normally would, this may start a conversation about how you are feeling and coping.



## Ask your GP about Cardiac Rehabilitation:

Taking care of your heart health is about your physical and emotional well-being. Cardiac



Rehabilitation is a programme which looks at many aspects of your health and lifestyle, including diet, physical activity, risk factor management, tips and tools for managing stress, and information and advice about new medications. Getting this kind of holistic support through a Cardiac Rehabilitation programme can make a big difference in enabling you to make a full recovery from a cardiac event or procedure. By dealing with all of these aspects of your health as part of your recovery, you are reducing the chances of a future heart problem and emotional problems like anxiety and depression.



## What can I do if I think I have depression?

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You may feel tired or depressed, and be in pain while you are recovering from a heart attack or a heart procedure. However, if you think you might have depression or if you have five or more symptoms of depression as listed in this leaflet for two weeks or more, you should contact your GP or a mental health professional. **Recognising that you are feeling down is a big step forward.** Talking to a health care provider will help you to get an appropriate diagnosis and to figure out what form of treatment is best for you. It is important to tell your GP what CVD treatment you have received and the medications you are taking so that a safe and effective treatment plan can be put into place.

Treatment for depression can take a number of forms and can be greatly supported by lifestyle changes. Depression treatments include talk therapies like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, medication, or a combination of the two. Your GP will help you to decide what approach to treatment is best for you.

It is very common to experience depression and you do not have to go through it alone. You can feel better with the right support and services, overcome depression and manage your heart health! There are many sources of support available to you, such as Aware.





If you are concerned about your mood, please contact Aware's Support Line on **1800 80 48 48** (7 days, 10am-10pm) or Support Mail service **[supportmail@aware.ie](mailto:supportmail@aware.ie)** (email anytime, you can expect a response within 24 hours).

## About Aware

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Aware is the national organisation providing support, education and information services for those impacted by depression, bipolar disorder and other mood related conditions. Founded in 1985, the organisation developed in response to the clear need for information, understanding and support, both for individuals with a diagnosis of depression or bipolar disorder as well as family members supporting a loved one. For more information, please visit [www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie).



*Supported by:*



For more health information or to support the work of Croí, the Heart & Stroke Charity, please visit our website at [www.croi.ie](http://www.croi.ie).



*Fighting Heart Disease & Stroke*

**Croí, the Heart & Stroke Charity**

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