

What is Depression?

Everyone feels sad or upset sometimes. Feeling low is a normal response to upsetting or difficult experiences, and these feelings will usually pass.

If you are affected by depression, feelings of sadness either remain, or are so intense that they interfere with day-to-day living.

Depression can also involve feelings of hopelessness, tiredness, low self-esteem, sleeping problems and physical aches and pains.

Depression is a common illness, which affects one in five people during their lifetime. It should not be feared, ignored or cause feelings of shame and embarrassment. The vast majority of people who are depressed will make a full recovery after appropriate treatment.

If you think you might be depressed, the first and most important step is to not be afraid to seek help from your family, friends, GP, or one of the many support groups (see back of this leaflet for contact details)

What is St John's Wort?

St John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) has a long history, extending back some 2,000 years, and was probably the first medicine to be used for treating depression. Research has shown that extracts of the wild flowering herb can help to relieve symptoms of mild to moderate depression. The key constituent, hypericin, has been identified as the primary active ingredient in the treatment of depression, which is why the most effective preparations are standardised to contain the same amount of hypericin in every tablet.

What evidence is there that it works?

Increasingly, research shows that standardised extracts of St John's Wort can be effective in the treatment of mild to moderate depression (British Medical Journal, 1996, 313, 253-258). However, St John's Wort has not been subject to the same stringent clinical trials as licensed medication, which proves that medicines work and are safe. There are makers of St John's Wort who are currently applying for a product licence for their brand.

1. How long before it works?

Individuals vary in their response to St John's Wort. Most people notice an improvement within 2 – 3 weeks.

2. How long should I take it for?

Again, this varies from person to person; however, it is suggested that in order to stabilise the improvement in mood, consider taking it for at least six months although you should start to feel an improvement within 3 to 5 weeks.

3. Will I become addicted?

There is no history of dependence from long-term use of St John's Wort.

4. What side effects can I expect?

St John's Wort is a herb, with few side effects when taken in conjunction with medical advice. However, it is important to keep to the recommended dosage as very high doses can cause gastric upsets and may make individuals with sensitive skin susceptible to photosensitivity.

5. Where can I get it?

St John's Wort is widely available from chemists, drug stores, health food stores and supermarkets. Look for a reputable brand containing a standardised extract and a recommended daily dosage of 300mg. Always consult your GP before taking St John's Wort.

6. I want to stop taking my conventional anti-depressant and take a natural alternative. What's the best way to do this?

Consult a GP or qualified medical professional for the best advice.

Important information about St John's Wort:

- Talk to your pharmacist or doctor if you are taking any prescribed medicines, especially digoxin, warfarin, oral contraceptives, ciclosporin, theophylline or medicines for epilepsy, migraine, depression or HIV
- As with most medicines and herbal remedies, St John's Wort should not be taken without medical advice by pregnant women, those wishing to become pregnant or breast-feeding mothers
- Herbal remedies are not usually recommended to children under the age of 16, however, research conducted in Germany demonstrated that St John's Wort provides a safe and effective treatment option to children with mild to moderate depression (Phytotherapy Research, Phytother: Res. 15, 367-370-2001)
- Treatment for depression can involve a variety of different approaches; these could include antidepressant medication, talking treatments, or self-help options. Often people find that a combination of these work best.

Further Information:

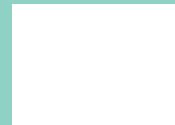
Mind – 0845 7660 163
Sane – 0845 767 8000

Depression Alliance

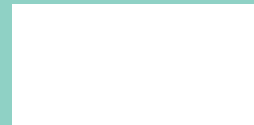
Depression Alliance is the leading UK charity for people affected by depression. We work to relieve this treatable condition by providing information, support and understanding. We also campaign to raise awareness amongst the general public about the realities of depression.

Depression Alliance coordinates a national network of self-help groups so that people with depression can share experiences and coping strategies with others in similar situations.

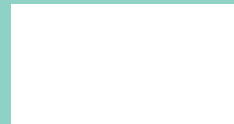
For more information about self-help groups in your area, as well as our other services for people affected by depression, please complete the form overleaf.



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London
SE1 7JB



Depression Alliance Scotland
3 Grosvenor Gardens
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Depression Alliance Cymru
11 Plas Melin
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Whitchurch
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CF14 2BT

You can also contact us via our main number 0845 123 23 20. You will automatically be directed to the relevant regional office, and all calls will be charged at the local rate.

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Depression affects one in five of us at some point in our life

St John's Wort has been shown to be an effective treatment for mild to moderate depression.



If you are worried about a friend or relative who is depressed, Depression Alliance can help.