



Overcoming

DEPRESSION



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What is depression?

Everyone feels unhappy, sad or fed up from time to time. These moods may last a few hours or a few days and people pull through, usually with some support from friends or family.

However, you may not be able to lift yourself out of a low mood. Depressing thoughts and feelings may become overwhelming and it may become hard to cope with everyday tasks.

If you find this happening often, it could be that you are experiencing a period of depression.

Depression is not ordinary sadness, nor is it weakness or a character defect; it is a condition that affects a person's mental and physical well being.

A person who is depressed may have some of the following symptoms:

- Low mood that persists over weeks or months
- Feeling hopeless, helpless and worthless
- Feeling irritable, angry with oneself or others
- Difficulty in getting to sleep, waking early in the morning
- Feeling unable to get out of bed in the morning
- Feeling tired all the time
- Loss of appetite or eating more than usual
- Poor concentration and short term memory
- Avoiding friends and social contact, wanting to shut the world out
- Not looking forward to pleasurable events and not enjoying anything
- Using alcohol, drugs or smoking to try and cope
- Wanting everything to stop, to go away
- Suicidal thoughts

What causes depression?

Sometimes depression may be a reaction to a major life event or change, such as bereavement, the end of a relationship, the ending of a course or an accident. It is normal to feel sad in these situations, but when the low mood is prolonged or intense, it may become depression.

- Depression may follow a series of life events, stresses or difficulties, where the cumulative effect wears down the person's capacity to cope.
- Depression can follow an illness, particularly a viral infection.
- Sometimes depression appears to come out of the blue, to affect someone who seems to have everything going for them. Many distinguished and high achieving people suffer bouts of depression associated with perfectionism and the fear of failing or not achieving goals.

Student life brings its own stresses and pressures and it may not be "the best time of your life". A survey of university students found that 7% of respondents would be classified as suffering from depression which compared with the 9% of the general population identified as suffering from a depressive illness in a survey conducted earlier .

There are some things you can do which may help to lift your mood:

- You may find that you have stopped doing some of the things that used to make you feel good. Try to pick up again the activities you normally enjoy, such as going out with friends or listening to music.
- Aerobic exercise helps to boost the production of mood enhancing chemicals, so, regular exercise, walking, swimming or dancing can help to lift your mood.
- Spend time with friends. Isolation can increase depressed and paranoid thoughts and feelings. If you have a friend or someone you trust, talk to them about how you are feeling. It may help you to feel less isolated and they may be pleased to have the opportunity to help.
- Do not sit in front of your work for hours when you are unable to think clearly. Depression often affects concentration and short term memory. These will improve gradually as your depression lifts. In the meantime, just do what you can, at times when you feel able to study.
- Speak to the concerned person or a member of staff in your Department or school, to let them know about your difficulties and to make arrangements about exams or coursework. Academic support may also be able to help with exam or timetable arrangements, or other practical support.
- Natural remedies may relieve mild depression and some people find homeopathy helpful. It is always advisable to consult your General physician first.
- Try to resist the temptation to blank things out, or manage sleep disturbance, by using alcohol, drugs or tobacco. These may provide temporary relief but they do not resolve the depression and they may make things worse.
- If you feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are having ideas about suicide, speak to someone who can help you. Contact the appropriate specialist or a counselor.

How can you help yourself?

- If you think a friend, or someone you know , may be suffering from depression, there are some things you can do that may help. However , there are also limits to what you can do and it may be that they need specialist help. There is a list of resources in this leaflet.
- Depression can distort a person's inner world into a nightmare of negative thoughts and feelings. As a friend, you can help by listening and by reminding them of reality . It is not helpful to imply that someone experiencing depression should pull himself or herself together as this is precisely what he or she cannot do.
- It can be difficult for someone with depression to ask for help as they often blame themselves for the way they are feeling . They may think they are being lazy or weak. Depression is a condition that responds to medical treatment. You can help by understanding this and helping your friend to understand this. If you can, encourage them to contact a counselor .
- People experiencing depression can be very difficult to be around. They may be irritable, frustrating and rejecting , particularly towards those closest to them. This may be a reflection of how hopeless, helpless and worthless they are feeling about themselves. Try not to be put off continuing your friendship by this behaviour .
- Try to encourage them to keep up the activities they enjoyed prior to the depression, particularly exercise and social activities.
- Do not encourage them to use alcohol or drugs to relax or forget their problems. These may bring temporary relief but they will not resolve the depression and may make it worse.
- You need to take care of yourself and supporting a person with depression can be draining. Take time away or with other friends as well. It is not selfish to look after yourself first. You may need some support or advice yourself. If you are concerned about a friend or someone who is having problems then do not hesitate to contact one of the support services.
- If your friend or someone you know is talking about suicide, either directly or in vague terms, take it seriously and encourage them to see the counselor at your campus. If this is not possible, speak to someone who can intervene. This may be a member of staff in your hostel or your Department or school.

What you can do to help someone else ?

When is specialist help appropriate?

Depression does not last forever. Sometimes it will lift quickly, particularly if the cause is resolved. However, depression can last for many weeks or months at a time when the pressures of coursework and exams may demand clear thinking and concentration.

Sometimes, self-help and practical and emotional support from friends and family, will be sufficient.

You may, however, feel anxious about worrying others, or feel uncomfortable talking with them about personal issues. You may feel too low to motivate yourself to take the first steps to recovery. If this is the case, a visit to the chief happiness officer's office may be helpful.

Treatment for depression may include counseling, medication or alternative therapies. If your General physician assesses that you are clinically depressed, he or she may suggest a course of anti-depressants. Clinical depression is associated with changes in the brain chemistry that regulate the production and distribution of serotonin, a naturally occurring, mood-regulating substance. The most frequently prescribed anti-depressants help your brain to produce and distribute serotonin more efficiently, which can lift your mood sufficiently to allow you to deal with the issues which are troubling you.

The services listed in this leaflet will help you to consider what approach might best suit you and assist you to get specialist help, if necessary