



Depression

Feeling down, sad or low is something we all experience at different stages of our lives. These feelings are normal if felt occasionally and are the body's retreat response to a loss or change. But if they persist or occur too regularly, they may indicate the onset of depression. Recognising the signs is the first step towards getting the help you need.

HELP 

From positive lifestyle changes to self-help groups and professional assistance, there are many ways in which depression can be alleviated and treated.

Signs of depression

The term depression covers a broad range of symptoms that impact a person's emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing. Milder depression may be experienced as 'the blues' and can still make normal day-to-day tasks difficult. The person may feel a sense of apathy and worthlessness and may find concentrating on tasks or making decisions difficult.

Where feelings of utter desperation or hopelessness exist, severe or acute depression can lead to thoughts of self-harm and suicide. Depression can affect people differently and may include any of the following symptoms:

- > Low self-esteem or self-worth
- > Loss of sex drive
- > Pessimistic view of life/the future
- > Unusually irritable
- > Reduced energy levels and activity
- > Feeling hopeless or helpless
- > Crying or the inability to cry
- > Self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Causes of depression

Depression can be triggered by a variety of events, from bereavement to job loss or a series of setbacks. Physical illness can be accompanied by depression, and postnatal depression can occur after childbirth. Bullying, intimidation and abuse, inside or outside work, isolation and loneliness, are also common causes. Increased alcohol intake, 'recreational' drugs, poor diet, little or no exercise – these can all contribute towards depression.

Treating depression

Your GP can offer appropriate treatment. This may include taking anti-depressants, which can be useful as an effective short-term treatment.

Some people find that counselling helps. In fact, research has shown that a combination of anti-depressants and counselling can be very effective, particularly cognitive behavioural therapy. Talking to a counsellor is often better than talking to family or friends, because a counsellor is independent – you can explore in confidence what may be causing the depression together with what might help you to cope and recover.

Helping yourself

The following tips may help:

Exercise and diet

It is important to stay fit and healthy and to take plenty of exercise. Exercise releases endorphins which naturally increases the positive mood states in the body. Similarly a well-balanced diet helps to provide the right vitamins and minerals and prevent that sluggish feeling from an unhealthy diet.

Routine

A routine can help provide some structure and framework to your life, particularly if you are off work.

Depression self-help groups

These work on the principle that it can be useful to meet, talk and exchange experiences with other people who are experiencing depression. It can help to break down feelings of isolation and find out how other people have been affected and how they have coped.

Moderate alcohol consumption

Alcohol is a 'depressant' which means it slows down the functions of the central nervous system. It might seem that alcohol helps to 'drown one's sorrows' but if there is any benefit, it is short-lived, and may lead to even greater depression and possibly dependence. People with depression are often advised to significantly reduce their alcohol consumption.

HELP support

HELP covers issues such as stress, depression, anxiety, bereavement, debt, relationships and work problems.

For further information, please call 0800 6888 777 or visit www.rmghelp.co.uk

You may also find the following websites and phone numbers useful:

Association for postnatal illness

Agency that support those who may be suffering from postnatal depression.

Tel: 020 7386 0868
www.apni.org

Careline

Crisis helpline that offers counselling services to children, young people and adults on any issue including depression.

Tel: 0845 122 8622
www.carelineuk.org

Depression Alliance

Provides information and support to people suffering from depression.

Tel: 0845 123 2320
www.depressionalliance.org

Samaritans

National 24-hour listening service for people in crisis.

Tel: 08457 90 90 90
www.samaritans.org