

Depression

What do we mean by Depression?

Everyone gets 'down' sometimes. Life has natural ups and downs, when we just feel 'fed up' or things don't go right. People often say they are 'depressed' when they are really referring to these normal low periods in life. If we suffer a major loss we may have emotions which are similar to those associated to depression, working through such feelings is a normal process although it may take some time. Depression is more of a long term problem which doesn't get better by itself. The difference between 'feeling down' and being depressed is one of intensity of feelings and duration. It affects people of all ages and backgrounds and is one of the most common reasons for seeking help from a counsellor or GP. One in 4 of the population suffers from depression at some point in their lives.

Feelings and Symptoms you may have when depressed

Depression is characterised by a feeling of all-pervasive gloom and loss of interest or pleasure in life. It also commonly involves;

- A change in eating, weight and/or sleeping patterns
- Difficulty concentrating or working
- Feeling irritable and short tempered, or tearful without being able to pinpoint the causes
- Loss of energy, listless and feeling you 'can't be bothered'; loss of interest in sex
- Feeling worthless or powerless
- Feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of self harm or suicide
- Negative thoughts about yourself, your situation and/or about the future

We all experience some of these feelings or symptoms at times, but someone who is depressed will experience a number of them for quite some time.

Why me? Some possible reasons why people get depressed

There is no simple answer to this, there are usually several factors. Depression can be a response to something distressing or a change in circumstances, particularly those involving a loss of some kind which seems to threaten our sense of identity or our very existence. These include leaving home/country, bereavement, being isolated, or a relationship break up.

However, often people become depressed for no immediate obvious reason. Sometimes a particular set of circumstances allow feelings which belong to something which hurt deeply

in the past to come to the surface. Sometimes it can be caused by a chemical/hormonal change which affects our body chemistry, or other physical conditions.

Things you can do which may help

When depressed it is easy to get stuck in patterns of behaviour or thoughts, which then make you more depressed and feel powerless to find a way out. However, there are things you can try which have been shown to ease depression. These could involve challenging your negative thoughts and trying to change your behaviour. This may seem difficult in your current state of mind, but may be possible in cases of mild depression.

A good first step is to try to think about why you feel like this now? Give yourself time to understand your feelings. Encourage yourself to start doing things again and try questioning some of your negative thoughts.

- Break tasks down into small manageable chunks, doing one thing at a time, starting with easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.
- Be realistic-there probably are things you've achieved, and recognising these will give you confidence.
- Try and spend time with people who are supportive and with whom you can be honest about yourself; isolating yourself increases depression while social support helps to lift a low mood
- Try to challenge your negative thoughts no matter how strong they feel at the time; accept that there may be a number of explanations for your current state of mind-avoid blaming yourself all the time
- If you feel it is appropriate try talking to other people to help you get a balanced perspective on which are the most likely explanation
- Many depressed people 'dose' themselves with excessive quantities of alcohol or other drugs to blot out painful feelings-try not to do this as many of these will make you feel worse
- Try to increase your levels of physical exercise-this helps the brain to produce endorphins (happy chemicals) and lifts mood
- Make sure you eat and sleep well

Further information about depression

For further information about depression go to the website www.studentdepression.org.uk. This website has been specially designed for students and has a wealth of information about depression and useful self help strategies

A self help programme giving further information about depression and strategies for managing moods can be found on www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax.cfm

Useful books include;

Overcoming Depression –Paul Gilbert
Mind Over Mood-Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky
The Feeling Good Handbook-David Burns

When should I seek professional help?

If you continue to feel isolated, powerless to do anything or unable to get on with your life, work or relationships then you should consider seeking further help.

If you are having difficulty eating or sleeping you can discuss this with your GP. Your GP will also be able to discuss the range of treatments available to you which could include counselling and/or medication. You may be worried about becoming addicted to medication but modern

Anti-depressants are not chemically addictive and many people find them helpful. They may not be a cure for depression but they can help (ideally alongside counselling) you to find the resources to address the circumstances contributing to your depression.

You can approach the University Counselling Service to ask for counselling - 01248 388520 or e-mail counselling@bangor.ac.uk for appointments for Assessments or Support Sessions

If you have strong feelings of hopelessness or are having persistent suicidal thoughts and feelings, you should contact someone for help as soon as possible.

- Within normal working hours you can contact your own GP
- Psychiatric Services and Community Mental Health Team, Hergest Unit, Ysbyty Gwynedd on 01248 363470;
- Out of Hours GP services are available on 0300 123 55 66
- Accident & Emergency Unit, Ysbyty Gwynedd, Bangor
- Social Services emergency number 01286 675502

Please visit our website for details of other emergency contacts.