

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 or trauma, we may have emotions which are similar to those associated with depression, but working through these can be a healing process, although it will take 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 both 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.

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 sleep
- patterns in concentration and 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 of circumstances - particularly those involving loss of some kind - which seem to threaten our sense of identity or our very existence. These include: leaving home/country, bereavement, being isolated, or a break up of a relationship

However, often people become depressed for no immediately obvious reason. Sometimes a particular set of circumstances allow feelings that 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 you are depressed it is easy to get stuck in patterns of behaviour or thoughts, which then make you feel more depressed, and powerless to find a way out. However, there are things you can try which have been shown to help 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 questioning some of your negative thoughts.

- break tasks down into small manageable 'chunks', doing one thing at a time, starting with easier things and progressing to more difficult ones
- be realistic - there probably are things you've achieved, and recognising these will help you to regain your 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 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 situation and 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 explanations

- many depressed people 'dose' themselves with excessive quantities of alcohol or other drugs to blot out the painful feelings - try not to do this as many of these will make you feel worse in the long run.

Additional help

If you continue to feel isolated, powerless to do anything or you cannot get on with your life, work or relationships then you should consider seeking further help. If you find it hard to talk to friends and family, it may help to talk to a counsellor (see below for details).

You could speak to your GP if you have difficulties with eating or sleeping. You can also discuss with your GP the range of treatments available to you, which could include counselling and/or medication. Many people worry about getting dependent on medication. However, modern anti-depressant medication is not chemically addictive. It may not be a cure in itself but it may help, along with counselling, to help you find the resources to address the circumstances contributing to your depression.

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

Outside normal working hours, you can telephone your GP Practice to see what arrangements are in place for emergencies, or go to your nearest hospital with an Accident and Emergency department. You can also telephone the Samaritans on 0845 7909090.

SilverCloud – Online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

SilverCloud is available to all registered students and staff, a free online self-help service to help anyone experiencing a variety of emotional challenges.

SilverCloud offers secure, immediate access to online CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) programmes tailored to your specific needs to support you in setting yourself goals, problem solving and building up your life skills. These programmes have demonstrated high improvement rates for depression and

anxiety.

There are currently four programmes available to students and staff:

- Anxious thoughts and feelings
- Depression and low mood
- Stress
- Body image

Sign up to SilverCloud today at:

mdxwellbeing.silvercloudhealth.com/signup

How to contact the Counselling and Mental Health Service

Please see website for up-to-date service details:

<http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/cmh>

The UniHelp Desk will be happy to tell you where to find the Counselling service or you can contact us at:

cmh@mdx.ac.uk

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