



These things are normal when you are depressed





and these also ...

Hopelessness

Use alcohol, food,
tobacco and drugs
more

Anger

Isolation

Withdrawn

Worthlessness

Low
motivation

Anxiety

Sleep
problems

Suicidal
thoughts

Change in
appetite



The Very Real Experience of Depression

Most of us have days or periods in our life when we are feeling 'low.' Usually we can identify the cause. This may range from having been unwell, or simply not having had enough sleep or any minor event/s in between. Those 'fed up' episodes usually don't last and once the issue that has caused it has been resolved, we feel much better and return to 'normal' life. Depression is generally defined as "a common mental health problem that causes people to experience low mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, low energy, and poor concentration" (Source: Mental Health Foundation). Depression is an unremitting feeling of sadness, unhappiness, reduced energy, hopelessness and generally feeling fed up lasting for at least two weeks, usually months. It is a genuine illness with lots of debilitating symptoms. Serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine are chemical messengers located in the area of the brain that are crucial for controlling pleasure, mood, sleep, appetite, concentration, sexual activity and motivation. Stress causes the depletion of these vital chemicals. Once depleted it can take a while for our bodies to restock itself which means that depression can take hold. If feeling depressed wasn't enough to deal with, anxiety is often in the mix too. Ask someone who suffers/has suffered from depression and they will tell you it is much more than having a few "off" days.

Some causes of depression

Depression is regarded as a common mental health condition. Common because, like anxiety, there is a high chance of experiencing depression at some point in your life. Currently (2019) the NHS claim that one in ten of us will be affected by depression and that men, women, young and old are all susceptible. Whilst depression is a complex condition and not completely understood, understanding the possible causes of depression may help your understanding of what is happening to you. Here are some examples which we hope will shed some light;

Childhood experiences

Experiences and trauma we have had during childhood such as the loss of someone close, an unstable home environment, abuse (either emotional, physical, sexual or neglect) and witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event/events.

Mental health problems

Living with other mental health problems may cause depression as you struggle to cope with the symptoms of your illness. This may be eating problems, anxiety or PTSD.



Physical health problems/illnesses

Living with life threatening illnesses, chronic health problems and any physical illness that significantly impacts your way of life can have a detrimental impact on mental health and well-being. Or living with someone who has a serious illness too.

Alcohol, recreational drugs and prescription medication

Although you may use alcohol or recreational drugs to make you feel better initially, they can make you feel worse in the longer term. Similarly, medication that may be prescribed to help can cause depression. It is important to discuss this in an open way with your Doctor as they will usually be able to prescribe an alternative. Specialist support can also be offered to deal with alcohol or drug dependency.

Poor self-care

While a poor diet, lack of adequate sleep and exercise won't directly cause depression they will make it harder to cope with difficult life events and result in you being more susceptible to developing depression.

Genetic inheritance

Though there is currently no scientific evidence to prove that there is a genetic cause, research has shown that if you have a close family member with depression you will have a propensity to develop depression yourself. This may simply be due to the way we learn behaviour and witness coping mechanisms from the people around us.

Significant life events

Having to adapt to changes in our life, generally trigger our emotions. What was previously certain and known becomes less so. Any major life changes such as; leaving home, moving to a new house, getting married, losing your job, being made redundant, losing a baby/child, being bullied, experiencing a physical or sexual assault, the ending of a relationship and bereavement are all likely to cause an alteration in our general sense of well-being.

Tell tale signs and symptoms of Depression

Once depression starts to take hold it can be like a runaway train if left unchecked. The symptoms can be hard to fight when energy levels are low and the capacity for positive thoughts and positive behaviours are impaired. Spotting the signs as early as you can will give you the best chance of fighting depression. Building in healthy coping mechanisms and taking charge as soon as possible will aid your quality of life.



Watch out for ...

Feeling sad, tearful or upset

Toxic self-talk, feeling worthless and a failure

Lack of motivation to do the things you would normally enjoy

Experiencing a sense of hopelessness and that life is pointless

Feeling numb, empty and irritable

Wanting to withdraw from others and life in general

Avoiding contact with family and friends

An urge to sleep more or finding it difficult to sleep

Increased or decreased appetite

Physical pain where there is no obvious cause

Lacking energy and feeling tired a lot of the time

USING ALCOHOL, FOOD, TOBACCO OR OTHER DRUGS MORE THAN USUAL

Urges to self harm

Suicidal thoughts

Lose of interest in sex or intimacy with a loved one

** not everyone will experience all these symptoms but if a few are present, they may be a sign that you need to seek help from your GP, family and friends **

Towards Recovery

There are many things you can do to aid your recovery from depression. Doing nothing WILL make the situation worse. Here are some suggestions for you to try:

Stay connected with people

Confide in someone - it can be difficult to open up about how you are feeling but just having someone to listen and show they care can be a real help. Seek peer support - a good support network is vital when we are struggling. Do not withdraw - it is bad for you and you are likely to lose a clear perspective on life. Being around people and their perspectives is likely to balance and stabilise your emotions.

Make yourself move around



Be active. Try to spend some time in nature ... go for a walk, notice the sights, sounds and smells. Do an exercise class, walk the dog. Try to set yourself achievable goals.

Small daily goals like getting out of bed by a certain time, having a shower, getting dressed, preparing a simple meal will boost your confidence and help you move towards bigger goals.

Nudge yourself to do things you enjoy

Make a list of things you usually enjoy. Even engaging for a little while can help. Reading/listening to other people's experiences can help remove a sense of isolation and help us feel that it is normal to react this way to certain situations. Write a diary noting any mood changes/fluctuations. Practice some Mindfulness exercises (see our separate leaflet). It may help you centre your thoughts and alleviate some of your symptoms. This is an excellent way to be present and not let your negative thoughts spiral out of control.

Challenge your fears

Anxiety can prevent us from getting on with life and feel like we have barriers in our way. Face your fears otherwise your world will shrink and become limited. Our anxious fears are imagined and rarely come true. On the other side of facing our fears is a sense of achievement and what a great feeling that is.

Self care

Try to avoid using alcohol or recreational drugs, they will make the symptoms worse. Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, drink water and try to avoid stogie starchy foods because it takes longer to digest and slows us down.

Take control

Having a routine and structure provides a sense of control. When depressed it is usual to feel that you have little or no control over your emotions so, take control over the practical things in your life such as your physical space, daily routines and sleep patterns.

Professional Help

There are various types of treatment that may be offered. It is important to remember that **YOU** have a right to be part of any decision around your treatment. Often when we are struggling with depression or any other mental health problem, we feel powerless and dependent on others. Do remember that you may have depression, but you **still have a voice**.

The type of treatment offered may depend on several factors. They will include your past history, severity of your symptoms, previous treatment, the impact on your daily life, whether there is an obvious cause and many more.



You may be offered or may want to explore yourself:

Talking therapies

Alternative therapies

Medication

Referral to Psychiatric services

Self-help resources

Some other therapies depending on your symptoms

Bereavement counselling if your depression is a result is a reaction to the death of a loved one (*See separate sheet on bereavement*)

Remember...

Recovery from depression is often a bumpy journey and not always straightforward. Different things work for different people. It is important that you share how you are feeling with your doctor or therapist so that alternatives can be offered where appropriate.

During your recovery you will find out more about yourself and some healing may take place as you learn and develop new ways of coping. Learning new coping mechanisms can help us become more resilient when dealing with the ups and downs of life. It helps you learn that while you may not always be able to alleviate all the symptoms of your depression; you can learn new coping skills and feel more in control.

Treatment for complex/severe depression

It may be necessary to refer you to a specialist mental health service if your depression is complex or severe. A team approach may result in a new medication regime or a return to/different type of therapy. If you have additional symptoms you may need different medication alongside your current treatment. You may need crisis intervention in the short term or if you are at risk of suicide or significant harm, a hospital admission may offer a safe, supportive environment alongside appropriate skilled care.

Final thought

Avoiding emotions always makes the problem worse. Being proactive means, you are taking control and will start feeling better sooner.



Managing your symptoms helps maximise your well-being.

Useful links:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/clinical-depression/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/self-care/#.XTM0tuhKjIU>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/coping-with-depression.htm>

https://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help/contact-samaritan/?gclid=EAlalQobChMI4Nrg_enD4wIVR7TtCh0IpACzEAAYAAAEgLPQfD_BwE

<https://www.thecalmzone.net/>

https://www.headstogether.org.uk/?gclid=EAlalQobChMIodOws-rD4wIVCrTtCh3I8Af0EAAAYAAAEgKxsvD_BwE

<https://www.rethink.org/aboutus/who-we-are/our-vision-and-impact/>

www.moodswings.org.uk

<https://www.ageuk.org.uk/information-advice/health-wellbeing/conditions-illnesses/depression-anxiety/>

<https://www.supportline.org.uk/problems/depression/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media/34727130/pnd-and-perinatal-mh-2016-pdf-version.pdf>

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/how-to-find-a-therapist/>

<https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/>