MANAGING DEPRESSION

CREATING A FRIENDLY, POSITIVE, INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Student Wellbeing Team
www.brighton.ac.uk/wellbeing
What is depression?

Depression is a medical term which covers a broad range of psychological distress. In its mildest form depression can cause lowered mood which does not stop you leading your normal life, but it makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, depression can be life threatening. You may feel like killing yourself or simply give up the will to live.

Anxiety

People who are depressed often experience anxiety too. You become anxious when you feel threatened, whether the threat is real or imagined. Anxiety can be expressed through physical symptoms such as headaches, aching muscles, sweating and dizziness. The mind of someone who is anxious is often full of busy, repetitive thoughts. These can make it hard to concentrate, relax or sleep. In the long-term, anxiety can cause physical exhaustion and general ill health.

What are the symptoms of depression?

Depression can produce a broad range of symptoms, which can be emotional or physical:

• A loss of interest and enjoyment in life
• A lack of drive and motivation that makes even simple tasks and decisions difficult or impossible
• Waking early or have problems getting to sleep
• Agitation and restlessness
• Feeling useless, inadequate, bad, helpless and hopeless
• Eat more and put on weight or not eat properly and lose weight
• Loss of outward affection, going off sex
• Be preoccupied with negative thoughts
• Find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions
• Thoughts of suicide; these are very common in depression and are much better admitted than covered up as they are a certain sign that help is needed.

What causes depression?

There is no one cause for depression. Mostly, depression is triggered by life-events, especially in a first episode of depression. What happened to you as a child can have a profound effect on how you feel about yourself in the here and now. Traumatic experiences such as a physical attack or rape can trigger depression, as can bereavement.

It is not just the negative experience which causes depression but how you deal with it. Negative experiences are more likely to contribute toward depression if your feelings about the experience are not expressed or explored.

Depression can also be linked to physical causes. Poor diet, lack of physical fitness and illnesses such as flu can leave you feeling depressed. Frequent use of recreational drugs can also lead to depression.

What treatments are available?

Most people with depression are treated by their GP. Depending on your symptoms, the severity of the depression and the circumstances, the doctor may suggest some form of talking treatment, anti depressant medication or both.

Talking and being listened to by someone who shows empathy and acceptance can help you to explore issues which are troubling you. A counsellor may be able to help you to develop a greater understanding of your feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

What can I do to help myself?

Depression has a major characteristic which you need to be aware of when thinking about what you can do to defeat it – depression can feed on itself, in other words, you get depressed and then you get more depressed about being depressed. Negative thoughts become automatic and are difficult for you to challenge. Being in a state of depression can then itself become a bigger problem than the difficulties which caused it in the first place.

• Don’t bottle things up. Have a good cry and talk things through.
• Eat a healthy balanced diet.
• Resist the temptation to get drunk. Alcohol depresses mood, so while it may give you immediate relief, this is very temporary and you may end up more depressed.
• Don’t get into a state about not sleeping, listening to the radio or watching TV still rests your body.
• Remind yourself that you are suffering from depression – something which many other people have gone through and that you will eventually come out of even though it does not feel like it at the time.
• Relaxation – try and do things that you enjoy. This could be doing some exercise, watching a TV show, reading a book, baking a cake, having a bath – anything that you look forward to and will give you a break.
• Distraction – try and take your mind off what you are experiencing. Try noting five things around you that you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. You can repeat this if needed.
• Talk to someone you can trust – this could be a friend, a housemate, a family member or anyone in your life. Sharing what you are experiencing can sometimes help.
Self-help organisations

Bipolar UK
Enables people affected by bipolar disorder/manic depression to take control of their lives.
0333 323 3880
www.bipolaruk.org.uk
info@bipolaruk.org.uk

Mind - for better mental health
0300 123 3393 (freephone)
www.mind.org.uk

Samaritans
24/7 confidential support for anyone in a crisis.
Tel 116 123
www.samaritans.org
jo@samaritans.org

Students Against Depression
A site for students who have been affected by depression, low mood, or suicidal thoughts or if you are concerned about someone who is depressed.
www.studentdepression.org

A list of support organisations that can help with a variety of issues can be found at www.brighton.ac.uk/wellbeingresources.

Useful books
- I had a Black Dog, Matthew Johnstone
- Mind over Mood: change how you feel by changing the way you think, Christine Padesky
- Depressive Illness- cure of the strong, Dr. Tim Cantopher
- The Compassionate MindPaul Gilbert