



Overcoming

DEPRESSION



The University of
Nottingham



The University of
Nottingham

University Counselling Service

Tel +44 (0)115 951 3695

Email counselling.service@nottingham.ac.uk

www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling

What is depression ?

EVERYONE FEELS UNHAPPY, SAD OR FED UP FROM TIME TO TIME. These moods may last a few hours or a few days and people pull through, usually with some support from friends or family.

However, you may not be able to lift yourself out of a low mood. Depressing thoughts and feelings may become overwhelming and it may become hard to cope with everyday tasks.

If you find this happening, it could be that you are experiencing a period of depression.

Depression is not ordinary sadness, nor is it weakness or a character defect; it is a condition that affects a person's mental and physical well being.

A person who is depressed may have some of the following symptoms:

- Low mood that persists over weeks or months
- Feeling hopeless, helpless and worthless
- Feeling irritable, angry with oneself or others
- Difficulty in getting to sleep, waking early in the morning
- Feeling unable to get out of bed in the morning
- Feeling tired all the time
- Loss of appetite or eating more than usual
- Poor concentration and short term memory
- Avoiding friends and social contact, wanting to shut the world out
- Not looking forward to pleasurable events and not enjoying anything
- Using alcohol, drugs or smoking to try and cope
- Wanting everything to stop, to go away
- Suicidal thoughts

What causes depression ?

SOMETIMES DEPRESSION MAY BE A REACTION TO A MAJOR LIFE EVENT OR CHANGE, such as bereavement, the end of a relationship, the ending of a course or an accident. It is normal to feel sad in these situations, but when the low mood is prolonged or intense, it may become depression.

- Depression may follow a series of life events, stresses or difficulties, where the cumulative effect wears down the person's capacity to cope.
- Depression can follow an illness, particularly a viral infection.
- Sometimes depression appears to come out of the blue, to affect someone who seems to have everything going for them. Many distinguished and high achieving people suffer bouts of depression associated with perfectionism and the fear of failing or not achieving goals.

Student life brings its own stresses and pressures and it may not be "the best time of your life". A survey of students at the University of Nottingham in 1998 found that 7% of respondents would be classified as suffering from depression which compares with the 9% of the general population identified as suffering from a depressive illness in the 1995 OPCS Household Survey.*

*Meltzer H, Gill B, Pettigrew M, Hinds K. The Prevalence of Psychiatric Morbidity Amongst Adults Living in Private Households, London:HMSO, 1995.

There are some things you can do which may help to lift your mood:

- You may find that you have stopped doing some of the things that used to make you feel good. Try to pick up again the activities you normally enjoy, such as going out with friends or listening to music
- Aerobic exercise helps to boost the production of mood enhancing chemicals, so, regular exercise, walking, swimming or dancing can help to lift your mood
- Spend time with friends. Isolation can increase depressed and paranoid thoughts and feelings. If you have a friend or someone you trust, talk to them about how you are feeling. It may help you to feel less isolated and they may be pleased to have the opportunity to help
- Do not sit in front of your work for hours when you are unable to think clearly. Depression often affects concentration and short term memory. These will improve gradually as your depression lifts. In the meantime, just do what you can, at times when you feel able to study
- Speak to your personal tutor, the senior tutor, or to another member of staff in your Department or School, to let them know about your difficulties and to make arrangements about exams or coursework. Academic Support may also be able to help with exam or timetable arrangements, or other practical support
- Natural remedies may relieve mild depression and some people find homeopathy helpful. It is always advisable to consult your GP first
- Try to resist the temptation to blank things out, or manage sleep disturbance, by using alcohol, drugs or tobacco. These may provide temporary relief but they do not resolve the depression and they may make things worse
- If you feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are having ideas about suicide, speak to someone who can help you. There are people you can talk to at Cripps Health Centre and the University Counselling Service. Staff are available 24 hours a day at the Queen's Medical Centre Emergency Department
- Initially, you may prefer to speak to someone you know. Your personal tutor, the senior tutor or the Disability Liaison Officer in your Department or School, or your hall tutor or hall warden, or any other member of staff, will put you in touch with services that offer specialist help. There are other members of the University community such as the chaplains, the Students' Union welfare officer and the welfare reps in halls, whom you may wish to approach

How

can you

help

yourself



- If you think a friend, or someone you know, may be suffering from depression, there are some things you can do that may help. However, there are also limits to what you can do and it may be that they need specialist help. There is a list of resources in this leaflet.
- Depression can distort a person's inner world into a nightmare of negative thoughts and feelings. As a friend, you can help by listening and by reminding them of reality. It is not helpful to imply that someone experiencing depression should pull himself or herself together as this is precisely what he or she cannot do.
- It can be difficult for someone with depression to ask for help as they often blame themselves for the way they are feeling. They may think they are being lazy or weak. Depression is a condition that responds to medical treatment. You can help by understanding this and helping your friend to understand this. If you can, encourage them to contact their GP or the University Counselling Service.
- People experiencing depression can be very difficult to be around. They may be irritable, frustrating and rejecting, particularly towards those closest to them. This may be a reflection of how hopeless, helpless and worthless they are feeling about themselves. Try not to be put off continuing your friendship by this behaviour.
- Try to encourage them to keep up the activities they enjoyed prior to the depression, particularly exercise and social activities.
- Do not encourage them to use alcohol or drugs to relax or forget their problems. These may bring temporary relief but they will not resolve the depression and may make it worse.
- You need to take care of yourself and supporting a person with depression can be draining. Take time away or with other friends as well. It is not selfish to look after yourself first. You may need some support or advice yourself. If you are concerned about a friend or someone who is having problems then do not hesitate to contact one of the support services.
- If your friend or someone you know is talking about suicide, either directly or in vague terms, take it seriously and encourage them to see their GP. If this is not possible, speak to someone who can intervene. This may be a member of staff in your hall of residence or your Department or School. The Emergency Department at Queen's Medical Centre is open 24 hours.

**What
you
can**

do

**to
help**

someone

else

?

When is specialist help appropriate ?

DEPRESSION DOES NOT LAST FOREVER. Sometimes it will lift quickly, particularly if the cause is resolved. However, depression can last for many weeks or months at a time when the pressures of coursework and exams may demand clear thinking and concentration.

Sometimes, self-help and practical and emotional support from friends and family, will be sufficient.

You may, however, feel anxious about worrying others, or feel uncomfortable talking with them about personal issues. You may feel too low to motivate yourself to take the first steps to recovery. If this is the case, there are a number of resources at the University and in Nottingham, that may be helpful.

Treatment for depression may include counselling, medication or alternative therapies. If your GP assesses that you are clinically depressed, he or she may suggest a course of anti-depressants. Clinical depression is associated with changes in the brain chemistry that regulate the production and distribution of serotonin, a naturally occurring, mood-regulating substance. The most frequently prescribed anti-depressants help your brain to produce and distribute serotonin more efficiently, which can lift your mood sufficiently to allow you to deal with the issues which are troubling you.

The services listed in this leaflet will help you to consider what approach might best suit you and assist you to get specialist help, if necessary.

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

The University Counselling Service offers free, confidential counselling, group therapy and workshops to undergraduate and postgraduate students and to University staff. The Service also offers support to those concerned about the welfare of a friend, housemate, relative or colleague. Counselling is available at University Park, Sutton Bonington, Jubilee and some School of Nursing and Midwifery Centres.

To arrange an initial appointment, telephone **0115 951 3695**, or e-mail counselling.service@nottingham.ac.uk or call in to room **A75 Trent Building, University Park**. Visit the web site at www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/ for further information and useful self-help links.

- **Your GP** can offer you support, advice, referral to specialist help or medical treatment. If you are registered with **Cripps Health Centre**, telephone **0115 846 8888** (Internal extension 75). Out of hours calls will be referred to Nottingham Emergency Medical Services.
- **Academic Support** offers advice, practical help and support to individual students experiencing study problems, in addition to assisting students with dyslexia or a disability. They also offer a range of workshops and groups throughout the academic year.
For details, visit their web site at www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicssupport or contact them at **Student Services Centre, Portland Building**, telephone **0115 951 3710**.
- Each School appoints a **Disability Liaison Officer (DLO)** to provide advice and guidance for students and members of staff, about disability issues and to offer support. For further information, visit the web site at www.nottingham.ac.uk/disability/disliaison
- **The chaplains** offer spiritual and emotional support and guidance, to students and staff of all faiths, or none. Contact the chaplains in the **Portland Building, University Park** or telephone **0115 951 3931**.
- **The Students' Union welfare officer** and the welfare reps in hall offer advice and support. Contact them through the **Student Advice and Representation Centre** in the **Portland Building**, telephone **0115 846 8730**.
- **Nightline**, telephone **0115 951 4985**, offers a confidential telephone listening service, run by students for students which is available from 7pm-8am every night during term-time.

Where
can you find help?
?

LOCAL AND NATIONAL RESOURCES

- The **Emergency Department**, at Queen's Medical Centre is available 24 hours, for medical assessment and treatment.
- **Nottingham Counselling Service**, 32 Heathcote Street, Hockley, Nottingham, telephone **0115 950 1743** offers confidential, subsidised counselling, to any individual aged over 20.
- **Speakeasy at Connexions**, 24-32 Carlton Street, Hockley, Nottingham telephone **0115 992 6102** offers free counselling, information and support, for young people aged between 13 and 25.
- **Focusline**, a telephone support service for anyone affected by mental health difficulties. Available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Telephone **0800 027 2127** (Freephone)
- **The Samaritans** offer a listening ear, 24 hours a day. Telephone **08457 90 90 90** (calls charged at local rate).
- **MIND** (National Association for Mental Health). For details of local service contact *Mindinfo*line, telephone **0845 766 0163** or visit the website at www.mind.org.uk

FURTHER READING

Overcoming Depression: a self-help guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques (*Paul Gilbert, Robinson*)