



**University of
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University Counselling Service

Overcoming Depression

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, not is it a weakness or a character defect; it is a condition that affects a person's mental and physical wellbeing.

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

- Low mood that persists over weeks or months
- Feeling hopeless, helpless or 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 a 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 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

How can you help yourself?

These 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 desk 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 staff are available 24 hours a day at the Queens 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, 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 members of the university community such as The Chaplains, The Students Union welfare office and the welfare reps in halls, whom you may wish to approach.

How can you help someone else?

- If you think a friend, or someone you know, may be suffering from depression, there are some things that you can do to 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 Queens Medical Centre is open 24 hours.

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, they 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 effectively, 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.

At The University of Nottingham

- **The University Counselling Service** offers free, confidential counselling, group therapy and workshops to undergraduates, postgraduate students and 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 campus and the Derby Medical School.

To arrange an initial appointment

1. Visit the web site at www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling and complete the registration form.
 2. Then telephone the Counselling appointment line on 0115 748 6344 or call into The Orchards, Building 6 on University Park.
- **Your GP** can offer you support, advice, referral to specialist help or medical treatment. If you are registered at Cripps Health Centre telephone 0115 846 8888. Out of hours calls will be referred to Nottingham Emergency Medical Services.
 - **Academic Support** offer advice, practical help and support to individual students experiencing study issues, in addition to assisting students with dyslexia or a disability. They also offer a range of workshops and groups throughout the academic year. www.nottingham.ac.uk/academicsupport or **contact your local Student Services Centre** www.nottingham.ac.uk/student-services
 - 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: <https://bit.ly/3aF6oWS>
 - **The Chaplains** offer spiritual and emotional support and guidance, to students and staff of all faiths or none. Contact the chaplains on University Park , Jubilee or Sutton Bonington <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/chaplaincy> 0115 951 3931
 - **The Students Union Advice** can help students with information, advice and representation around all aspects of student welfare and education such as financial housing and course issues
www.SUAdvice@nottingham.ac.uk 0115 846 8730 Portland Building C Floor.
 - **Nightline**, is a student-run service providing confidential listening and information. Is it a non-advisory service. 7pm – 8am every night during term time. 0115 951 4985 www.nightlineanon@nottingham.ac.uk

Local and National Resources

- **The Emergency Department** at Queens Medical Centre is available 24 hours for medical assessment and treatment.
- **NHS Urgent Care Centre** 0115 883 8500 – Seaton House, City Link, Nottingham, NG2 4LA 7am – 9pm – www.nottinghamcitycare.nhs.uk – offers assessment and treatment for urgent but not life threatening.
- **Nottingham Counselling Centre** – Unit 5, Victoria Court, Kent Street, Nottm, NG1 3LZ – 0115 950 1743 – 9-8 Mon – Thurs 9 -4 Fri BACP registered counsellors.
- **The Samaritans** – 24 hours a day 365 days a year call 116 123
- **MIND** – Helpline 0300 123 3393 – info@mind.org.uk – Mental health charity