



**University of  
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**University Counselling Service**

# **Overcoming Depression**

## **What is depression?**

Most of us feel unhappy, sad, or fed up sometimes. These moods may last a few hours or a few days, and can usually be managed with some support from friends or family. Feeling poorly, or not getting enough sleep over a long period, can sometimes leave people feeling low in mood.

If your experience of low mood is more persistent, however, you might find it more difficult to manage in the ways that you usually do. Depressing thoughts and feelings may be pervasive, and you might find that you are struggling to cope with everyday tasks.

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

Depression is a broad term that describes a range of experiences - including persistent low mood - but can also describe a severe decline in how you feel about yourself and your life. It is not the result of weakness and may not be something you can overcome by yourself.

Depression can affect various aspects of your mental and physical wellbeing and might include the following:

- 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 to cope
- Wanting everything to stop, to go away
- Suicidal thoughts or feelings of not wanting to be here

## **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 a healthy reaction to feel sad in these situations and for some time afterwards. When low mood is prolonged or intense and it is affecting your day-to-day capacity to cope over a longer period, it may be described and diagnosed as depression by your GP.

- Depression may follow a series of life events, prolonged stress, or challenging circumstances, where the cumulative effect wears down a person's capacity to cope
- Depression can follow a period of illness.
- Sometimes depression appears unexpectedly, having a significant impact on someone who seems to have everything going for them. Many high achieving people experience bouts of depression associated with perfectionism – the quest for unrealistic goals and a fear of failing.

Student life brings its own stresses and pressures. Students are often told that it will be “the best time of their life” and for many this is simply not the case.

**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 about yourself. Try to resume some of the less daunting activities you used to enjoy, such as going out with friends or listening to music.
- Try to establish a daily routine or rhythm to your day based around self-care and basic needs – meals and nutritional intake, keeping hydrated, sleep, exercise and some social interaction.
- Exercise helps to boost the production of mood enhancing chemicals, so, regular activities that give your heart rate a boost will also boost 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. People often worry about being a burden but talking to someone from time to time is unlikely to have this effect on another person and it is possible that you do this for others already.
- Try not to sit in front of your laptop or computer for hours when you are unable to think clearly. Depression often affects concentration and short-term memory. These will improve gradually as your depression eases, and you redevelop your confidence in being able to work for short periods. Do what you can at times when you feel able to study.
- Speak to your Support and Wellbeing Officer or your personal tutor to let them know about difficulties you might be experiencing with exams or coursework. The Student Academic Skills Team [Student Academic Skills Team](#) may also be able to help with exam or revision techniques and the Support and Wellbeing officers for your school can help with timetable arrangements, extenuating circumstances applications and other practical support.

- Natural remedies may relieve mild depression, but it is advisable to consult your GP (doctor) first.
- Try to resist the temptation to avoid things that you know are stressing you, or to manage by using alcohol or recreational drugs. These may provide temporary relief, but they do not resolve the depression and sometimes can make things worse.
- If you feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are having thoughts about suicide, it is important speak to someone who can help you. Cripps Health Centre provide same day appointments with a mental health specialist - 24/7 Mental Health Helpline number 0808196 3779 or visit [Cripps Website](#). Staff are also available 24 hours a day at the Queens Medical Centre Emergency Department [QMC Emergency Department](#) or you could use this link [Emergencies](#).
- Initially, you may prefer to speak to someone you know. Your personal tutor, the Support and Wellbeing officer in your school or residential support 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 Officer and the Residential Experience Support team 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, it is also useful to note that there are limits to what you can do, and it may be that they need specialist help. There are links to some resources in this leaflet
- Depression can mean that the person you are supporting is focused on negative thoughts and feelings. As a friend, you can help by listening and by reminding them of a more balanced perspective but if, you cannot persuade them, it might be better not to persist. It is not helpful to imply that someone experiencing depression should pull themselves out of it, as this is precisely what they 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 or a burden on others. Depression can be eased by medication and specialist support. You can help by encouraging them to speak to someone who can direct them to the right support service such as a member of support staff at the university.
- People experiencing depression can be difficult to be around. They may be irritable, frustrating, and rejecting, particularly towards those closest to them. This may reflect how hopeless, helpless, and worthless they are feeling about themselves.
- Try to encourage them to keep up some of the activities they enjoyed prior to the depression, helping them to identify which ones feel manageable.

- You need to take care of yourself and supporting a person with depression can be draining. Take time out for yourself or make sure that you spend time with other friends as well. It is not selfish to prioritise yourself. You may need some support or advice yourself. If you are concerned about a friend or someone who is having problems, 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 (doctor) or a mental health specialist. If this is not possible, speak to someone who can intervene. This may be a member of residential support staff or a Support and Wellbeing Officer in 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 can lift quickly, particularly if the cause is resolved. However, depression can last for many weeks or months at a time.

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 access support. If this is the case, there are resources and support services at the university and in Nottingham that may be helpful. [UoN Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).

Treatment for depression may include counselling, medication, or other support. If your GP (doctor) assesses that you are clinically depressed, they may suggest 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.