

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Depression

Am I sad or depressed?

Depression is a real illness with real symptoms, and not something you can 'snap out of' at will. With the right treatment and support, people can make a full recovery. Some of the symptoms noticed can be:

- persistent low mood, with guilt
- anxiety
- low self-esteem
- difficulty sleeping/ sleeping too much
- tiredness
- fatigue
- changes in appetite
- weight gain or loss
- possible suicidal thoughts, perhaps self-harming.

Why do I feel like this?

Life events like bereavement, an unexpected change, a shock or even something considered happy, like a birth in the family can all trigger depression, when you perceive yourself as out of control of the situation. Or sometimes there's no one event, and people with a family history of depression are more likely to experience depression themselves.

Sometimes symptoms may appear in the present or years after a past event or issue. Although it seems inexplicable that they've arisen now, they could be to do with not having had the opportunity to talk through things with somebody.

What can I do to change my mood?

A helpful way to deal with depression is to make an appointment to see a professional, to begin a course of anti-depressants and/or talking therapies such as counselling. If you feel your symptoms aren't yet so extreme, you could try some of the following:

- Talk to someone close to you about how you really feel. Going over a painful experience and allowing yourself to cry can help you come to terms with it;
- Try to spend some time each day walking outdoors;
- Eat regularly and healthily;
- Try to keep your alcohol intake to a minimum as it will only make the depression worse and harder to treat;
- If you can't sleep, get up and do something you like, that can distract you till you feel ready to sleep – reading, watching TV, something creative...?
- Try some relaxation techniques that could help distract you from your thoughts and calm the body and mind.

Many of these techniques are about taking care of your body; physically getting in as good shape as possible so that your mood can begin to improve. Physically taking care of yourself is about supporting yourself through this difficult time. You may like to get some external support to do this.

Getting help

If you are very low in mood or depressed consider going to your GP surgery, or phone and make an immediate appointment to see the Duty Doctor. If your need is less urgent, you may prefer to discuss your situation first with a counsellor.

Currently registered students can contact either of our Administrators and register for an appointment with one of our counsellors. What matters initially is that you talk to someone rather than avoid people.

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Anti-depressants take a few weeks to begin being effective. Your GP will discuss this with you if he/she prescribes them. It's important to take the tablets regularly so that they can stabilise your mood. Only stop taking them after consulting your GP, who will advise you on how and when it's safe to do so. Stopping suddenly can lead to headaches, renewed symptoms of depression, anxiety, stomach upsets and other disturbances.

How to give help

Talk to the depressed person. Simple as that might sound, talking and listening to understand conveys that you value that person. That alone could be worth a lot to somebody who is depressed.

In depression people often feel nobody understands. Encourage the person to seek professional help from the GP or the Counselling Service, where they will be listened to non-judgementally.

Supporting a friend who feels so low is draining. If you're very worried about your friend/flatmate, contact the Counselling Service for an appointment for yourself, to have the chance to talk it through.

Cultural differences

Most of what is in this leaflet reflects a Westernised view of depression. How people experience depression and the meaning it has for them can vary depending on cultural background.

Further resources:

University of Reading Counselling and Wellbeing Service: Email: counselling@reading.ac.uk or telephone: 0118 378 4216

Northcourt Medical Practice (for students currently registered with the practice): Telephone: 0118 987 4551, or your own GP surgery.

*Relaxation CDs: you can pick one up from the University Counselling Service in the Carrington Building for £2, or there are a number of CDs and websites available with different helpful relaxation strategies.