



Depression and Low Mood

Most people will be able to identify with feeling 'down' or not quite themselves. If this feeling continues over a period of weeks it is important to see your GP as you may be experiencing depression. Depression can be thought of on a spectrum from light/ mild through to severe 'clinical' depression, and can affect people in many different ways. Below are some common symptoms of depression – if you are worried about your mood, tick off ones which feel familiar to you:

Feelings

- I am low-spirited for much of the time*
- I often feel restless*
- I get tearful easily*
- I feel numb, empty and full of despair*
- I feel isolated and unable to talk to other people*
- I am short tempered or impatient*
- I find little pleasure in life or things I usually enjoy*
- I sometimes feel helpless*
- I have little interest in sex*

Thoughts

- I am having difficulty remembering things*
- I find it hard to concentrate or make decisions*
- I blame myself a lot and feel guilty about things*
- I have no self-confidence or self-esteem*
- I am having a lot of negative thoughts*
- I have been thinking about suicide*

Physical Symptoms

- ☐ *I have difficulty sleeping, or I am sleeping much more than usual*
- ☐ *I feel tired and have no energy*
- ☐ *I have lost my appetite, and am losing weight, or I am eating a lot more than usual and putting on weight*
- ☐ *I have physical aches and pains with no obvious physical cause*

Behaviour

- ☐ *I'm not doing activities I usually enjoy*
- ☐ *I'm avoiding social events I usually enjoy*
- ☐ *I have cut myself off from others and can't ask for help*
- ☐ *I am self-harming*

If you have ticked a few from each category then it would be important to see your GP or health professional to discuss your mood, especially if you have had thoughts of suicide or are self-harming. It may be helpful to take this booklet along with you to start the conversation.

Depression is unique to each individual person, and the causes of depression also vary from person to person – Some people find talking therapies are helpful as this helps them gain a clearer understanding of what it means to them. Periods of depression can be triggered by life events, physical illness, change, bereavement or loss, alcohol and/or drug use, and sometimes as a side effect to medication.

Some people believe that depression is genetic, or due to a chemical imbalance of the brain. Whilst we do inherit our genes from our parents, there is an argument that learned behaviour plays a big part in why depression is often prevalent amongst family groups – for example if we grow up in a household where our parents did not talk about feelings or emotions, we too may find it hard to talk about how we are feeling. The evidence for depression being due to a chemical imbalance on the brain has been inconsistent, and chemical testing is not usually used in the diagnosis of depression.

Getting Help

It is important to be aware that there are no 'quick fix' solutions, but building a series of self-care strategies that can be maintained is helpful. A common symptom of depression is a lack of energy and motivation, however the more involved you are in your recovery the better the results.

Not all people who experience depression need medication – this is a choice you can make, and should be discussed with your GP. There are many other options that people often find helpful to try before considering medication.

Strategy One: Self Care

It is important that we take care of ourselves, and often people do not build in regular 'me time'. Take a moment to think of three things you do, for yourself that help you keep well and list them below (i.e. Going to a fitness class, reading, meeting up with friends)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

When the last time was that you invested this time in yourself? If it has been more than a few days it may be time to rethink your self-care toolkit. Try setting yourself some goals that will give you satisfaction-it's important that any self-care activities are for **you** rather than to meet the needs of other people. Some people find it helpful to schedule appointments for themselves in their diary, as you would if you had a dentist appointment for example, that way they set aside dedicated time to invest in themselves.

Strategy Two: Connect with People

Feelings of low mood can leave us feeling isolated – it's important to try and keep in touch with relatives and friends that are supportive. Try and build up contact if you have been out of touch, start with a short phone call and go from there.

Often, support groups can be great support, you will hear what has helped other people and can offer mutual support. Scottish Families affected by Alcohol and Drugs run family support groups in the community – why not have a look on our website for one near you, or alternatively we have online virtual family support groups that can be accessed from anywhere in Scotland. If you would like to take part in a virtual family support group, simply give our helpline a call for more information on **08080 10 10 11**.

Strategy Three: Talking Therapies

There are many different types of counselling and talking therapies available, some are one to one, and others may take place in a group format. It's important to find the right support for you. The SFAD website has a local service directory that will give you a list of all local services – don't be afraid to contact a few to find out what they offer before deciding which suit you best. Through SFAD you also have access to our helpline which is open until 11pm every evening.

Strategy Four: Mindfulness

More recently there has been a rise in the popularity of mindfulness. Mindfulness has been around since the 1970s and is an integrative approach which helps us be more aware of our thoughts and feelings and looks at how we manage them.

Anyone can learn to be more mindful, and you don't need any expensive kit to do it. It can be practiced anywhere, and is easily integrated into everyday life. For more information see the 'useful links' section at the end of this document.

Strategy Five: Get some exercise

Physical exercise releases endorphins which lift our mood naturally. Try going out for a brisk walk, or meet a friend for a swim.

Try the NHS fitness tool below to measure your current fitness levels, and build a plan from there

<http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/Fitness.aspx>

Small, manageable changes can make a big difference to our mood so don't wait until tomorrow – try something new today.

If your symptoms have been ongoing for more than a few days, it's important to see your GP to make them aware of how you are feeling – often people do not need ongoing GP support, but your GP may have access to local services that can help support you, and if your symptoms do persist, can advise on what medications may be helpful.

The NHS offer a Depression self-screening tool which may be useful

<http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/depression.aspx>

Useful Links

NHS Self help guide for depression <http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/Depression.asp>

MIND information on depression and downloadable booklet <http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/about-depression/#.VXW5JM9Viko>

Information on Mindfulness <http://bemindful.co.uk/>

Information about counselling <http://www.itsgoodtotalk.org.uk/>