

DEPRESSION

Am I Depressed?

You may be uncertain whether or not you are depressed. Everyone's experience of depression is different, and there is a wide variety of symptoms (see below). Many people feel 'down' occasionally, or go through bad patches, but have some areas in their lives that make them feel good, and like some things about themselves and their lives. However, others struggle to feel positive about anything in their lives and at times they feel complete despair. *If you feel like that then you are depressed.*

Some of the Symptoms of Depression

- Disliking/hating yourself or other people in general
- Thinking negatively; always seeing the worst in everything
- Finding everything a terrible effort
- Being very irritable
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Heavy dependency on alcohol or drugs
- Cutting yourself off from other people
- Unable to stop crying or unable to release tears
- Loss of appetite or compulsive eating
- Suicidal thoughts

What Can I Do About My Depression?

Depression spans a spectrum. At one end you can struggle on, leading a more or less normal life, but feeling awful; at the other end the depression may be life-threatening and you may feel suicidal. How can you help yourself?

With short-term moderate depression:

- Keep as occupied as you can with things that really interest you.
- Get physical – play sport, jog, dance: do anything that gets you 'out of your head' and into your body, at least 5 times a week. Endorphins will help!
- Do anything which makes you laugh. Look after yourself physically. Eat healthily and avoid drugs. Pay attention to your appearance to make yourself feel good.
- Ask for help. Others are usually very willing to listen. Let yourself lean on friends.
- Don't hold your feelings in. Cry and get angry if you need to.
- Practice challenging some of your negative ideas – especially about yourself. Are you actually a bad person, or are you just judging yourself too harshly? (See separate leaflet on Banishing Negative Thoughts)

For severe depression, you need to consider getting help:

Severe depression is when:

- a) It is stopping you functioning rationally e.g. you are not going to lectures/eating/getting out of bed, and/or
- b) You are actively considering suicide.

Where Do I Find Help?

It may be difficult to put any of the above suggestions into action if you are very depressed. If that is the case, then it is important that you seek help. There are several sources of help:

Counselling/Therapy - Make an appointment to see a Student Counsellor who can help you decide what support to seek. Sometimes a combination of forms of help is what makes all the difference.

Medical Treatment - Don't be afraid to see your GP if you are depressed. Your GP may refer you to appropriate help or may offer medication in the form of anti-depressants. Medication does not take away the cause of the depression, but may give you enough of a lift to take action to deal with the depression yourself, and with support, as suggested above.

Self-Help Groups - These are organisations run by people who have been depressed. They offer advice and information and put people in touch with one another. It can be comforting to know that you are not alone in feeling as you do, and helpful to learn how others cope.

Around 75% of the population suffers from depression at some time in their lives. If you learn to recognise your particular set of symptoms which tell you you're depressed, and acquaint yourself with the coping mechanisms for trying to deal with them, you can often learn how to manage your depression. It is very important not to think you are weak or inadequate because you are depressed, but to marshal your resources for finding a way out of your depression. Many people find it helpful to read and learn more about the management of depression. There is a wealth of literature on the subject available from most large book stores. Below there are a couple of titles and a few contact details you may find useful.

BOOK/CONTACTS LIST

Some of these books are in the Counselling Service Library and may be borrowed through the Counselling Service Administrator or through your counsellor

www.studentdepression.org

www.depressionalliance.org

Breaking the Bonds: Understanding Depression, Finding Freedom (1996) Dorothy Rowe. HarperCollins Publishing

50 Things You Can Do Today to Beat Depression (2005) Paul Vincent. Upfront Publishing

How to Lift Depression Fast (2004) Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrrell. HG Publishing

Overcoming Depression: A Self-Help Guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques (2000) Paul Gilbert. Constable and Robinson