

## Depression

### What is depression?

Depression is a very common problem and affects 1 in 5 people. People who suffer from depression may experience some of the following symptoms:

Feeling sad, upset, tearful, loss of interest or pleasure in most things, withdrawal from social contact, increase or decrease in appetite, weight loss or weight gain, feeling numb, difficulty sleeping, tiredness, feeling restless, lack of energy and motivation, feelings of worthlessness, guilt or despair, difficulties with memory and concentration, suicidal thoughts, negative or critical thoughts, assuming the worst will happen, lack of confidence and self-esteem.

It is normal to have some of these symptoms from time to time, particularly if you are going through a difficult or stressful time, for example, if somebody close to you has died or a relationship has ended. At these times it can be helpful to talk to somebody you trust and share your feelings. However, if these symptoms persist and worsen, depression may have developed. These symptoms may have a significant impact on your day-to-day life and cause you distress. They might affect your relationships, your social life and your ability to do your job.

### What causes depression?

There is no one cause for depression. Often there are different reasons why we might have depression. Some people are more vulnerable to developing depression, depending on their genetic predisposition, brain chemistry, early life experiences and their general outlook or whether they tend to think negatively about things. Sometimes difficult or stressful life events can lead to depression, for example, being made redundant or being diagnosed with a physical illness. Conflicts and losses in interpersonal relationships might also contribute to depression, as might having a baby (post-natal depression).

### How do I overcome my depression?

There are a number of ways in which depression can be managed, including anti-depressant medication and/or talking therapies. Your GP will be able to advise you on the most appropriate way for you to overcome your depression. There are also some things that you can do to help yourself feel better.

If you would like to arrange an appointment with one of our psychologists to discuss depression, contact us on 0131 215 1066 or email [info@craigiepartnership.co.uk](mailto:info@craigiepartnership.co.uk)

Below are 7 tips to help you help yourself deal with depression.

### **Tip 1: Keep active**

Try to keep as physically active as you can. Physical activity is important for well-being and can help us feel more alert and energetic, as well as helping us sleep. You might want to join a local gym or attend a weekly exercise class. Why not team up with a friend and you can motivate each other to take regular exercise, or maybe take the dog for longer walks?

### **Tip 2: Establish some realistic goals and tackle them bit by bit**

It can help if we have specific goals to work towards. Breaking our goals up into shorter term goals makes them more achievable which can boost our mood and confidence. If our goals are realistic for us, we are more likely to reach them and see the results. Setting goals can help to motivate us and give structure to our day. For example, if you feel you have lost contact with a friend and want to get back into socialising with them, you might decide to send them an email or text first, before working up to speak to them on the phone, or before arranging to meet them in person for a coffee. Or you might set yourself a healthier eating goal and so begin to incorporate small changes into your diet, bit by bit.

### **Tip 3: Be kind to yourself**

In depression, it is easy to be self-critical and to stop doing the things we enjoy. But of course, if we don't look after ourselves or don't have anything to look forward to, our mood can continue to drop. That's why it's important to plan to do enjoyable activities that can distract us from our problems and give us a sense of pleasure and achievement, which is an important part of recovering from depression. You might also want to reward yourself with a treat after you have done something you found difficult, for example, watching a favourite film or having a relaxing bath.

### **Tip 4: Think about your thinking**

Our thoughts can be very powerful in terms of how they make us feel and behave. In depression, we are more likely to think more negatively about things, rather than interpret things from a more balanced, rational view. Our thoughts can become quite distorted towards the negative and that can affect how we feel. For example, the thought "*I'm useless, so what's the point in bothering?*" might cause us to feel quite hopeless and low in confidence – and therefore less likely to try to achieve our goal, which in turn lowers our mood. Sometimes the way we perceive and interpret a situation can make us feel worse. We adopt irrational, unhelpful thinking styles which can cause us to misinterpret events. Try challenging your negative thoughts with the following questions:

- Am I jumping to negative conclusions and assuming that the worst will happen?
- Is there any evidence to suggest that the worst case scenario will happen?
- What advice would I give to a friend who was in a similar situation to me?
- On a good day, do I think about this situation differently? In what way?

### **Tip 5: Problem-solve**

A problem-solving approach can help to tackle your problem step-by-step and help you feel more in control. Think of a current problem you are struggling with and try and apply the following problem-solving steps:

- Step 1: Select the problem area you are going to tackle and define it as clearly as you can. You might need to break it down into a smaller target.
- Step 2: Write down as many possible solutions to your problem that you can think of, even if you think they are silly.
- Step 3: Write down lists of advantages and disadvantages for each possible solution.
- Step 4: Choose one of the solutions.
- Step 5: Plan the steps that are needed to carry out the solution you have chosen and include a plan of what you will do if your solution does not fully work out.
- Step 6: Carry out the solution you have planned.
- Step 7: Review the outcome. Was the solution you chose successful? Did anything not go so well? Would you do anything differently?

### **Tip 6: Be assertive**

Saying “no” can be a difficult thing to do if we think we are going to offend someone. Asking for support can also be hard if we think we will be a burden to others. However, it is important to communicate effectively about how we feel and what we would like to change - otherwise very little will change, and that can make us feel even more depressed, frustrated, annoyed and angry. Assertive communication can be an effective way to express our needs, opinions and feelings, to ask for what we want in a direct and appropriate way, without violating the rights of other people. Assertiveness allows us to defend ourselves, complain or give constructive feedback in a confident and honest way, rather than coming across as aggressive or offensive, or as submissive or passive.

### **Tip 7: Talk – don’t be afraid to ask for help**

Don’t underestimate the power of talking through your difficulties with somebody that you trust. Being able to confide in a trusted friend, partner, family member or colleague can help you feel supported. You might also begin to see your difficulties from a different perspective and not feel so alone with your problems. You can also speak to someone confidentially on the phone through an organisation like The Samaritans (08457 90 90 90), or ask your GP about other sources of support, such as psychological therapy.

You can also contact the Craigie Partnership who can advise you on the most suitable support for you and arrange an appointment with one of our team of psychologists.



*Article written by Margaret Bowes, Psychological Therapist at the Craigie Partnership.*

We hope you will find these tips to be helpful. If you would like to make an appointment with Margaret Bowes or one of our team, then contact the Craigie Partnership on 0131 215 1066 or email [info@craigiepartnership.co.uk](mailto:info@craigiepartnership.co.uk)

This article is part of a series of self-help articles written by Psychologists at the Craigie Partnership. The full series includes:

- Anxiety
- Anger
- Confidence & Self-Esteem
- CVs & Interviews
- Depression
- Sleep Issues
- Stress

You can find out more about the Craigie Partnership and our team on the following websites:

Therapy & Psychological Services: [www.edinburghpsychologyservices.co.uk](http://www.edinburghpsychologyservices.co.uk)

Careers & Coaching: [www.edinburghcoachingservices.co.uk](http://www.edinburghcoachingservices.co.uk)