

## **Depression**

### **Facts**

Depression is one of the most common medical conditions – it is estimated that 1 in 4 people will suffer from it at sometime in their lives. It is twice as common as diabetes, three times as common as cancer and more common than asthma. It can be an illness in its own right or a secondary illness or part of a physical condition. But - however bad you feel now, you will get better. Depression can be cured

### **Symptoms**

#### **Mental and emotional**

Pessimism, negative outlook  
Tearful, crying for no apparent reason  
Indifferent or irritable with children and partner  
Feeling miserable and hopeless

#### **Physical symptoms**

Loss of energy, drained, worn out  
Aches and pains  
Loss of appetite or eating more  
Increase/decrease in weight  
Difficulty in sleeping or sleeping more

#### **Suicidal**

Pro-occupation with death and methods of suicide

### **Who are the people who suffer?**

Overall depression is twice as common in women than as in men  
Some mothers of babies and young children  
15% of people over 65  
People who have recently experienced divorce, bereavement, or a major life event eg redundancy.  
Adolescents (3%) and children (1%)

### **Causes of depression**

The cause of depression is still not fully understood.

**Cognitive Theory** suggests that the depressed person has low expectations and so puts the most pessimistic interpretation possible upon any situation.

**The biological theory** suggest that depression is no different from, say, diabetes in that it results form a body irregularity – a brain chemical in the case of depression- that can be corrected with medication.

**The cause of Seasonal Affective Disorder** (SAD, winter blues) is low light levels, but why this should trigger depression is not fully understood

**In post-natal depression**, several stresses appear to act together: a previous history of depression, lack of emotional or practical support, a sick baby and – most significantly – plummeting levels of hormones.

Depression can also be caused by a number of prescribed drugs

## **Treating Depression**

Anti-depressant drugs in use today are not habit-forming

Sleeping tablets and anti-anxiety drugs, also known as tranquillisers, however are potentially addictive.

Anti-depressants do not actually cure the condition of depression. However, anti-depressant medication is valuable and effective in that it eliminates the biological symptoms of depression, in turn alleviating the dreadful psychological symptoms, with the result that you will feel much better.

As a rule if an anti-depressant has shown no benefit within 6 weeks, your doctor may suggest another drug. It is important to take anti-depressant drugs regularly, as they need to build up in the blood.

### **What are the alternatives?**

There is little alternative to medication for people who are severely depressed or psychotic, except for electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Anti-depressant medication works better than most other treatments.

For mild to moderate depression complementary approaches are helpful

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**Supportive Psychotherapy:** enables you to air your problems, as you perceive them to a sympathetic ear.

**Cognitive Therapy:** in treating depression, the aim is to identify and challenge negative and pessimistic thought patterns with a view to developing more realistic and more objective thoughts. These, by definition, are more optimistic, so your mood improves and your depression starts to lift.

### **Sunlight and light therapy**

**Exercise:** Try to walk for an hour each day and take regular vigorous exercise several times a week. Walking and swimming are the best all round forms of exercise, but choose the right exercise for you.

**Meditation/visualisation/relaxation.** A hypnotherapist can teach you the principles of hypnosis and self-hypnosis so that you can use these techniques at home

## **References**

What you Really Need to Know about  
Living with Depression

Dr R Buckmann

Marshall Publishing UK