



LawCare Ltd.
Health Support and Advice for Lawyers

Stress and Depression

Helplines

For Solicitors, Law Students and Legal Executives in England and Wales:
0800 279 6888

For Solicitors, Advocates and Law Students in Scotland, Northern Ireland
and the Isle of Man: 0800 279 6869

For Barristers, Barristers Clerks and Judges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland:
0800 018 4299

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LawCare Ltd. Registered Office: 50 Broadway, London SW1H 0BL
Registered as a Charity in England and Wales no. 1061685 and in Scotland no. SC039335
Company Registration No. 3313975

What is Stress?

We are constantly hearing about stress. Many of us are constantly complaining about it. Some claim that it is the root cause of more illnesses than anything else. Certainly it can lead to physical problems such as headaches and high blood pressure, as well as mental illnesses such as depression.

Of course, not all stress is bad. "Stress can be the spice of life, the exhilaration of challenge and excitement, the high of living with heavy demands on you. Once you make a friend of stress, the forces which once seemed to be working against you become positive energies that define you, strengthen you and help you express your own brand of creativity and joy" (Leslie Kenton, *"Beat Stress"*, Vermillion, 1996)

Put simply, a stressful circumstance is one with which you cannot cope successfully (or believe you cannot cope) and which results in unwanted physical, mental or emotional reactions. Stress is your reaction to the levels of pressure upon you.

- In the first stage you may find yourself feeling overworked, uncertain of your own abilities, and reluctant to take days off.
- In the second stage you may find yourself tired, irritated and frustrated, working long hours but seeming to achieve less. You may be skipping meals, or "comfort eating".
- In the third stage you may feel resentful or guilty, you will probably be neglecting your family and friends, and will no longer be enjoying work or life.
- Finally you may withdraw completely, succumb to illness or drug or alcohol abuse, feel a failure or completely break down emotionally and mentally.

If you are suffering from stress, even in the earliest stages, it is important to take steps to control it. Stress can have severe consequences.

LawCare has been providing help and support to lawyers suffering intolerable stress and/or depression since 1997. This pack is a starting point to help you to understand and address this problem, but further advice should be sought from your GP, and by calling the LawCare helpline.

The Consequences of Stress

Mental Illness

Stress leads to mental problems, at best the difficulty in thinking clearly which comes with not having a decent night's sleep, at worst severe clinical depression, schizophrenia and paranoia.

Family Problems

Of course you have to work to support your family, but do you have to support them quite so much? Your spouse and children have a higher claim to your attention than even the most important client.

Work Problems

"If you want something done, ask a busy person." The more you do, the more people will expect of you and the more they will take you for granted. The insular world of the office, where people with little in common spend so much time together, can be an unhealthy one. Petty jealousies, minor irritations and office gossip can be magnified out of proportion unless you spend plenty of time in the real world.

Physical Illness

The body can only take so much. If you continue to push yourself - working through the night, eating "on the hoof", keeping yourself awake with coffee - your physical health will suffer. Stress is a major cause of heart disease, and your immune system will be compromised.

Stress and Heart Disease

Being under constant stress in the workplace increases your risk of dying from heart disease because when stressed the body releases the hormone noradrenaline which increases your blood pressure and your risk factor. When this is combined with smoking and a high blood cholesterol level you will have the three highest risk factors for contracting heart disease. Heart disease is the biggest killer in the UK, killing more people than all the cancers, AIDS, murders and accidents combined. The symptoms include coughing and shortness of breath, pain in the chest, neck, arms or jaw, tiredness and dizziness. You can cut your risk by giving up smoking, losing weight and eating healthily. If in doubt, ask your GP for a health screen.

Working with a Stressed Person

Remember that:-

People under stress lose their perspective.....
aim to keep yours.

People under stress make those around them ill too.....
use stress relief techniques, (for mental, physical and emotional well-being), to stop you from getting caught up in the stress.

People under stress cause rows.....
don't get sucked in, use assertiveness techniques to cope.

People under stress can be unkind.....
remember that you are a person with rights too. Be kind to yourself. If you like and respect yourself you will find it easier to be kind to the stressed person.

People under stress can be cruel.....
don't be a martyr. You need to look after yourself, build your own support network, offload, seek counselling if necessary.

People under stress need someone to lead them into relaxation.....
be your stress sufferer's 'barometer', suggest helpful routines, if he or she will let you.

People under stress need gentle concern, not criticism.....
be willing to offer genuine care and concern.

People under stress can be hard to work with.....
You cannot be expected to listen endlessly to moans and groans if the stressed person is not willing to do anything. Don't withdraw your care but recognise you have a right to enjoy work in your own right, get on with living. This will invariably cause the sufferer to reach his or her rock bottom faster and seek help and do something about self help.

People under stress make you tired.....
ensure you get your own space, enough sleep and rest.

People under stress dwell in the past, blame others and feel pessimistic about the future...
so keep the person focusing on today, live one day at a time; a better day today will make tomorrow easier to handle; take life in bite-sized chunks. I can do for an hour what I could not hope to do for a lifetime!

**YOU CANNOT CHANGE THE OTHER PERSON BUT YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR
REACTION TO THEIR BEHAVIOUR.
BELIEVE THINGS CAN CHANGE AND THEY WILL CHANGE.**

Where is Your Stress Coming From?

An important first stage in dealing with stress is to identify its source. Once this is done, you can begin to plan a strategy to tackle it. You may like to tick the boxes which apply to you.

- Career Development
Job insecurity, poor pay, lack of status, uncertainty about future
- Job Content and satisfaction
Too much or too little work, impossible targets, lack of variety
- Colleagues
Unsupportive colleagues, no friends among colleagues
- Work Schedule
Inflexible, long or antisocial hours, long or difficult commute
- Firms /Chambers Culture
Lack of support or supervision, claims pending
- Money
Excessive debts, living from paycheque to paycheque
- Illness
Health fears, exhaustion, problems overcoming minor ailments
- Time Management
Growing "to do" list, full diary, impatience when waiting
- Spouse/Partner
Frequent arguments, unfair sharing of chores, little time alone together.
- Family
Small children/teenagers at home, responsibility for family decisions, elderly parents to care for, abuse in past.
- House
Unsatisfactory living accommodation, recent or impending house move, too little space, growing list of chores
- Social Life
Too many/too few social commitments, feeling guilty at neglecting friends

Keeping a Stress Diary

One of the best ways to identify sources of stress is to keep a stress diary for two or three weeks. When you begin to feel stressed, look at what you are doing and what you were doing before, and note these down. Any physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach pain, should also be noted.

You can then start playing detective, looking for clues to your stress. If you see that every day at about 9.30 you have a bad headache, you may also note that at 9.00 every day after rushing the kids to school you have braved the traffic on the way to the office. If on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday you had trouble getting to sleep, you may find that on each of those evenings you brought work home from the office. As you work through the diary you come to realise that what appeared insignificant at the time could in fact be a major stress trigger and you need to make changes if you are serious about managing or preventing your stress.

At the end of the diary you need to write down three things:

1. the exact cause of your symptom, (physical activity, a thought etc.)
2. the reason why the activity is causing the symptom (timing, the way we do it etc.)
3. our goals for eliminating the symptoms.

And we end up with something like:

1. Cause of headaches: rushing to get to school and work every morning.
2. Reason for symptoms: timing, not enough time to do everything, feel rushed, traffic.
3. Possible solutions:
 - a) get up a little earlier
 - b) get spouse to take kids to school
 - c) get a bike
 - d) prepare the night before

Eventually, if you keep up the diary, your natural ability to recognise symptoms will become easier, you will identify stressors instantly and will be able to act promptly before they become a problem. You can start making changes in your behaviour patterns and way of life, and develop methods of dealing with specific stressors; often these changes can be very simple ones. However, there may be times when you just cannot see a way out. This is when the help of a professional trained counsellor can be very useful. If you would like to know more please contact LawCare in complete confidence.

Some Suggestions for Dealing with Stress

This page contains some general tips for dealing with stress, both at home and at work. The following pages suggest other methods which may prove helpful.

Home

- Don't talk too much. Before you speak, think about whether you have something important to say, and what the consequences of saying it might be. Try listening more instead.
- Eat healthily and exercise regularly. (See "Beat Stress through Diet and Exercise" page)
- Give up smoking. You may think it relaxes you, but in actual fact nicotine only creates a new stress—that of craving for a cigarette.
- Avoid alcohol. It is a depressant and is liable to make stress problems worse, not better.
- Learn to relax and unwind, perhaps by meditating or better still by chatting (not about work!) with your spouse, partner, children or friends.
- Get a decent night's sleep, the longer the better. If you have problems getting to sleep, force thoughts of work out of your mind by planning your next holiday or composing a poem.
- Plan and book a holiday with your family or friends, and ensure that the office knows that you will be off for *at least* a week no matter what crisis should occur. Use your full holiday entitlement.

Work

- When you are feeling very stressed, **STOP!** Ask yourself what is the worst thing that would happen if you did not do the tasks before you, and whether it will still matter a week later.
- Protect your time by not over committing yourself. Learn to say '**NO**'. (See following page for some tips)
- Be realistic about deadlines. Being over optimistic usually means increasing the pressure on yourself and letting people down later.
- Build some 'breathing space' into your day. When you plan the work you will do, leave a good hour or so for those little things that crop up
- Change activities regularly. If you are doing a lot of computer work, for instance, make a phone call or speak to a colleague.
- Take short work breaks. Walk around the office or have a cup of coffee (not too much though!). A five minute break every hour will actually increase your concentration whilst reducing stress.
- Take a proper lunch break and **DO NOT** work while you are eating.
- If a task seems overwhelming, break it down into bits and deal with them one at a time.
- Try to do one thing at a time. Attempting several things at once only increases stress levels and lowers performance all round.
- If you are getting impatient about something, ask yourself why you are letting it annoy you. Take some deep breaths and **RELAX!**

How to Say NO gracefully (Courtesy of Coach Dianna Keel)

Many people have difficulty saying “no,” and boundary invaders take full advantage of this difficulty. If a request or a question makes you feel uncomfortable, it is probably an attempt to invade your boundaries, even if the other person is not fully aware that this is what s/he is doing. If a straight-out “NO” is too difficult for you, try some of the following alternatives. (But also practice saying a plain NO. It strengthens your boundaries.)

- I’m really over-committed right now and if I take this on I can’t do it justice.
- I appreciate your confidence in me. I wouldn’t want to take this on knowing my other tasks and responsibilities right now would prohibit me from doing an excellent job
- I’d be happy to do this for you but realistically I cannot do it without foregoing some other things I’m working on. Of tasks a and b, which would you like me to do? Which can I put aside?
- I can do that for you. Will it be okay if I get back to you in the middle of next week. I currently have a, b and c in the queue.
- If you had let me know earlier we could have talked about it, but it’s just not possible for me now.
- I can see something needs doing, but it should be done by the person who caused the problem in the first place, not by me.
- It would be far more appropriate for you to do that yourself.
- Thanks but I’ll have to pass on that. *When you use this plain “No”, say it, then shut up. You don’t want to ruin the effect.*
- I really appreciate your asking me but my time is already committed. *This is a gentle way to say no.*
- I wish I could, but it’s just not convenient. *The real masters of the “I’m Sorry” No somehow get the other people to apologize for even asking. I’m always amazed when I see this happen.*
- I promised _____ I wouldn’t take on any more projects without discussing them with her first. *This not only makes it someone else’s decision but also postpones it and allows you to decide if you really want to say no. Only use when you’re not sure which one you actually want to say – the yes or the no.*
- I just don’t have the time to help you but let me recommend someone else I know. *A great way to say no while still helping the person by giving another option.*

Never ever say “maybe”. Maybe is only a way of postponing a decision. When you know you want to say no, say no. Otherwise you’re not playing fair with yourself – or others. And saying “maybe next time” makes it harder and harder to say no the next time. Don’t fall into this trap. Remember – whatever you say “yes” to means you are saying “no” to something else. Make sure you that what you say “yes” to represents your priorities or you will find you are living a frustrated and unrewarding life.

Stress Management - A Meditation Exercise

1. Body Awareness

- Sit, feet on the ground, back reasonably straight, but not rigid.
- Concentrate your whole attention on what you feel physically in your body...
- Don't think, just focus on what you feel...
- You may begin with your feet and work upwards, spending a moment or two on each part of your body that you can feel...
- If you feel an itch, discomfort or want to move, acknowledge it, tell yourself "It's alright" and try not to move...
- If you become aware of thoughts or questions, treat them as an itch! Acknowledge them but
- then go back to concentrating on the physical feelings in your body...
- Stay with this exercise until you have focussed on all of your body and then, let go...

2. Breathing

- In the same position, relaxed with your back straight, concentrate your attention on the physical feeling of breathing in, then of breathing out.
- Do not deliberately change your breathing, although you may find that it does change naturally, becoming slower and deeper.
- Should this exercise make you feel breathless, abandon it.
- Do not be surprised if this exercise makes you feel drowsy.
- Once you are rested, you may want to turn this exercise into something more explicit. If so, let your in-breath express your worries, anxieties, guilt, pain, one-by-one and on your out- breath surrender them.
- Do not moralise or judge yourself, just let go...

3. Listening

- Listen to the sounds, the traffic in the distance - to the little sounds in your room. Don't push them away as irritants; they are part of your life, accept them.
- Put your hands over your ears and listen to your breathing. Listen to your thoughts and feelings, acknowledge them and let them go. Don't push them away as irritants; they are part of your life, accept them.
- Now go back to listening to the external and internal noises. Listen to the nuances, to the pitch and intensity of the sounds...then let them go...
- Let your mind be quiet.

4. Be Still

- With your mind and body still, remain at peace for as long as is appropriate. Focus on the stillness.

Stretching Away Your Stress

You have been sitting at your desk for hours on end and suddenly you are hit by the umpteenth headache this week. You put the blame on your desk, on your computer, on the position of the window or the height of your chair, but all too often the real cause is stress which causes tension across your shoulders and back and thence to your neck and head. Stress can also affect your arms, hands, wrists and back with tightening of the muscles. There are plenty of very short exercises which can help to relax you and here are a few.

The most important point is not to hold any position for very long. Pain is NOT gain in this area. Just hold the position to a point where you start to feel the tension, then take ten deep breaths and relax.

Back and Shoulder

Stand facing the wall and place your hands on the wall shoulder width apart. Your toes should point forward and your knees should be slightly bent. Lean forward, lowering your head between your arms until you can feel the stretch across your upper back, shoulders, neck and arms.

Mid back Stretch

Sit up straight and lace your fingers behind your head, keeping your elbows at ear level. Then pull your shoulder blades towards each other.

Lower Back Stretch

Pain or discomfort in the lower back is very common among those of us who sit for long periods at a desk. Sit up straight in your chair. With both hands grab your left leg just under the knee. Keep your right foot flat on the floor. With your left leg bent, slowly pull that leg towards your chest. Then do the same with the other leg.

Hand Stretch

To release the tension in your hands, stand and hold your left arm straight in front of you, putting your left hand up as though you were a policeman stopping the traffic. Then put the palm of your right hand against the tips of your left fingers and gently pull your left hand back towards your forearm. Do this until you feel tension across your fingers and the underside of your wrist. Hold this position for ten deep breaths and then change hands.

Facial Stretch

Have you ever noticed how your face becomes taught with concentration? There is a very simple exercise to relieve this but it is suggested that you do this in complete privacy! Raise your eyebrows and open your eyes as wide as you can. Open your mouth as if to yawn and stick your tongue out as far as possible. Like all these exercises, hold for ten deep breaths and then relax.

Time Management at Work

There is so much to do... and not enough time! Struggling to keep up leaves you stressed and depressed. Try these tips for making minutes count.

- Ensure you get up on time by putting your alarm clock across the room so that you have to get up to turn it off.
- Before you begin your day, think of three things that will give you pleasure that day. Don't think about any negative things, and forget yesterday completely. Think of one (realistic) thing you want to achieve today - even if it's only "Eat lunch".
- Leave for work earlier than usual. You'll be less stressed at red lights and if you do get there early you'll have a few peaceful minutes before the phone starts ringing.
- Open mail with the waste paper bin handy, or get an assistant, if you have one, to sort your mail first and weed out all the junk.
- **PRIORITISE!** Put all the things you have to do in order of importance. Think about how much time each task will take, then add half that time again. In an eight hour work day you have six hours of actual working time, plus one hour for a lunch break (which is important), and another hour for unavoidable and unforeseen matters. Put everything you're not going to be able to deal with today out of the way. Then gather together all the information, files, documents and telephone numbers you'll need. The best time to do this might be first thing in the morning, or perhaps before you leave the office at night so that you can get started right away the next day.
- Each day list which tasks are essential, which you would ideally like to do if possible and what it would be good to do if you have time at the end of the day - "Must, Should and Want" lists.
- If someone asks you to do another task, don't be afraid to say "If I do this I won't have time to deal with this other file. Which would you like me to do?" Let the onus of your being unable to do everything fall on someone else. Turning down additional work will not make you look half as bad as failing to do work you have accepted, or doing it badly.
- If a matter arises, such as a phone call, which isn't important, don't be afraid to say "This isn't a good time, please call back later".
- Don't subscribe to journals and periodicals you never have time to read.
- Fifteen minutes before you're due to leave work - stop working! This is the time to organise everything ready for the next day, clear away files, pat yourself on the back for getting so far through your "Must, Should and Want" lists, and start winding down and switching off. That way you should actually be ready to leave in time to catch your train.

To help you put all this into practise on a daily basis, ask for a copy of LawCare's Anti-Stress Desk Workbook.

What is Depression?

*"People who don't know, who say it's self-indulgence, sound callous, but it's not a callousness born of indifference; I think it's a callousness born of ignorance. That kind of ignorance we've got to get rid of, and little by little I suppose, we will. You say to them, 'It's a pity you don't know. I'm sure that if you knew, I'm sure that **if you knew**, not only wouldn't you say that, you'd try to help in one way or another."*

Mike Wallace, *On the Edge of Darkness*

Depression is:

- an illness, just like heart disease or diabetes are illnesses.
- an illness that affects the entire body, not just the mind.
- an illness that one in five people will suffer some time in their life.
- a major cause of alcohol and drug abuse and other addictions.
- an illness which can be successfully treated in more than eighty per cent of cases.
- an illness which affects all ages, all races, all economic groups and both male and female. However, women suffer from it twice as much as men.

Depression is NOT:

- something to be ashamed of.
- the same thing as feeling 'down' or having the 'Monday morning' feeling.
- a character flaw or the sign of a weak personality.
- a 'mood' that someone can 'snap out of' any more than one can snap out of a heart attack.

All of us will experience dejection and sadness at time, but when those feelings continue and seem to bear little relation to the circumstances of the person's life, depression may be diagnosed. Depression is sometimes triggered by traumatic events or prolonged stress, but can occur without any apparent reason.

Depression is characterised by lethargy, anxiety, despair, desperation, poor sleep, lack of motivation, loss of interest in things previously enjoyed, inability to concentrate and, in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts. Around 80% of suicides are linked to depression. One in four people will suffer from a mental illness at some point in their lifetime, with depression the most common.

Treatment for Depression

The most effective treatment for clinical depression has been shown to be competently prescribed and monitored anti-depressant medication coupled with regular counselling sessions. Anti-depressant drugs were first formulated in the 1950's, and fall into several categories.

- Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (such as Nardil) are useful in the treatment of panic attacks, extreme anxiety and phobias.
- Tricyclic antidepressants (such as Amitriptyline) were the drug of choice from the 1960's until the late 1980's, but are used now only when SSRI's have proved ineffective. They elevate mood, normalise sleep and appetite, improve memory and concentration and increase physical activity in 60-70% of patients with severe depression.
- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (such as Prozac and Seroxat) are the most popular class of antidepressant drugs at present.
- Newer types of drug, such as NASSAs, SNRIs and NRIs (including Zyban and Edronax) are also beginning to be widely used.

All anti-depressants take between two and six weeks to show any effects. Often the first symptom to be diminished is insomnia, with elevation in mood taking several months to be established. For this reason, many people become disillusioned when, having taken the pills for a month, they feel no better. It is important to take the medication for several months and if you feel it is not working after that time, to return to your GP and asked for your medication to be reviewed. It may be that a different type or brand of pill will be more suitable for you.

Alternative Treatment

At LawCare we hear regularly from people who have been diagnosed with depression by their doctor, but are reluctant to take anti-depressants. There may be several reasons for this:

- They may worry about side effects (although side effects to antidepressants occur only rarely and are relatively mild).
- They may worry that the drugs are addictive – perhaps confusing them with benzodiazepines. Any drug which makes the patient feel better can become psychologically addictive because the person connects their feeling of well-being with the drug and becomes reluctant to stop taking it, but antidepressants are not generally physically addictive.
- Many people dislike the idea of taking unnatural chemical substances into their body for any reason, and shun most or all pharmaceutical products, preferring to look after their health through natural and holistic means such as diet and exercise. Certain religious or philosophical communities also fall into this group.
- Finally, there are some who do not believe that their depression is an illness which needs to be cured. Well-meaning friends and family tell them to “snap out of it”, and they believe that their melancholy mood is a natural response to events around them. “Of course I feel bad, my life is terrible, but there's nothing wrong with me.”

The Government currently recommends that GPs do not prescribe antidepressants at all to patients suffering mild to moderate depression, but reserve the drugs for the most serious and acute cases. If you have been prescribed anti-depressants, it is because your doctor believes that you need them and they will help you. They have been rigorously tested to a high standard, and are among the most commonly prescribed medications.

For mild depression, however, other treatments are recommended, and if you are someone who still prefers not to take antidepressants, or who has not been prescribed them, these therapies may be of benefit.

Counselling

Counselling has been shown to be very effective indeed in treating depression, although certain types of counselling which dwell on the past and look for the causes of problems may be less effective and even detrimental in dealing with depression. Depression counselling should be future-orientated, time limited and solution focussed. The current therapy of choice is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Counselling is available on the NHS, although there may be a waiting list, or private counsellors can be found by personal recommendation or through the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (www.bacp.co.uk).

Exercise

Exercise raises mood as well as increasing fitness, and provides an outlet for negative feelings. A study done in September 2000 showed that exercise is as effective as Zoloft – a popular antidepressant – at treating mild to moderate depression, and more effective at preventing it recurring. Whether it's a walk in the open air each day, a bike ride, an aerobics class with friends once a week or a swim in the local pool, physical activity increases the level of endorphins, the “feel good” hormone. It also helps you learn to set and achieve goals (such as swimming an extra length each time), feel a sense of accomplishment and measure improvement.

Alternative Therapy

Alternative therapies may help, especially if you are someone who is open minded to such options. Many people swear by reflexology, acupuncture or acupressure, visualisation and music therapy. Spirituality can also be beneficial – a Study by Duke University in North Carolina found that those who attend a religious service once a week or more were half as likely to suffer from depression.

Homeopathy

Homeopathic and herbal remedies may provide relief. Among herbal treatments, St. John's Wort has been shown to be so effective at treating mild to moderate depression that it is the most commonly prescribed antidepressant in Germany. Other useful herbs include camomile, damiana and lemon balm. Like alternative therapies, homeopathy can be regarded as a complementary treatment, meaning that it can be taken alongside conventional antidepressants. Although home homeopathy kits are available, it may prove more beneficial to consult a qualified homeopath.

People and pets

Surround yourself with supportive people who like you and are capable of saying so. It is easy for people suffering from depression to become isolated and imagine that others are rejecting them, but it is particularly important at this time to maintain a close relationship with friends and family. Tell them that you are suffering from depression, but try to resist the urge to talk about your woes and bleak feelings with them – save that for your counsellor. Pets can also be very helpful in providing company and reassurance. A dog, for example, needs to be walked daily (providing exercise, fresh air and green space), fed and groomed (nurturing and caring for others helps stop a depressive person being absorbed with their own self-pity) and gives much needed unconditional love and companionship. If you live alone, even a goldfish can help you feel less isolated and be a calming influence.

Get Out More

A study by the University of Essex showed that exercising outdoors in a green space is more beneficial than exercising indoors. Fresh air, sunlight and greenery have all been shown to raise mood. Seasonally Affected Depression (SAD) is a type of depression which

occurs in the winter months due to the lack of natural light, but even if your depression is not of this type spending time in the sun can help. Enjoy your garden, local park or the countryside as much as possible.

Relax

Depression is often related to stress, and learning to relax can be key in both overcoming the illness and preventing it recurring in future. From massage to taking up a new hobby or decluttering your life, anything which makes you feel relaxed will be beneficial. It is important also to discuss with your GP whether it is appropriate for you to work or not. Going to work as usual can be helpful in the process of recovery because it creates routine, gives you stimulation and something to think about, and makes life seem more “normal”. However, if you are too ill for work then you need to think about how you can use your spare time to aid your recovery. A few relaxing weeks away from the office may speed your recovery considerably.

Avoid Alcohol

There is a tendency for people with depression to drink or smoke more in the belief that these can help to relax them. However, it is important to be aware that it is unwise to drink alcohol if you suffer from depression, since alcohol is a depressant and will worsen your symptoms in the long term. It may also be contraindicated with your antidepressants. Smoking will also do little to alleviate the depression, since, like all addictions, it leads to withdrawal symptoms and cravings, which are stressful and damaging to the body. Any relaxation you think you feel as a result of lighting up is actually only because you are alleviating these cravings. Stopping smoking is a more permanent solution. Part of your treatment plan for depression should include avoiding alcohol and monitoring how much you smoke. Needless to say, other harmful substances should also be avoided, and you will need to decide for yourself whether this includes caffeine.

Self-Help Books

There are hundreds of books available today which claim to help you cure depression yourself; for example, by teaching you to challenge your negative thoughts, forgive yourself or let go of the need to be perfect. Again, these are complementary to other types of therapy but can be extremely helpful. See “Beating Depression with the Three As” for some self-help exercises.

Whether or not you are prescribed, and choose to take, antidepressants, a combination of these treatments may aid your recovery. Make a definite plan for your recovery – factoring in regular exercise, for example, or a visit to the library to choose a self-help book – and keep a diary noting everything you do to help yourself get better, and each step in the process to recovery. Remember that it takes time, and read back through your journal so that you can see the progress made whenever you become disillusioned.

Depression in the Workplace

Did You Know...

- 1 in 20 workers suffer from some type of depressive illness
- 75% of people try to hide their depression from others
- Early treatment means less time lost at work, increased productivity and the avoidance of costly consequences.
- Over 80% of cases of depression can be treated quickly and effectively.

What Should I Look For?

- Absenteeism
- Falling productivity.
- Indecision
- Bad decisions
- Poor morale and uncharacteristic lack of co-operation.
- Complaints of aches and pains or tiredness on a regular basis.
- Disruptive, interfering or domineering behaviour.
- **Alcohol or drug use or abuse.**

How Can I Help a Colleague or Employee?

- Learn as much as you can about the illness
- Think of depression as a possibility where there are any of the tell tale signs listed in the previous paragraph.
- Look out for depression where there has been a death in the family, a change in job responsibilities such as promotion or demotion, or personal upsets.
- Look out for depression but **DO NOT** diagnose it or attempt to treat it. That is a job for the professionals.
- Hints of suicide such as "life is not worth living" should be taken seriously. Depression can kill and suicide is how it does so.
- Encourage them to get help. They may well realise they are depressed but the negative thinking which goes with the illness may well stop them seeking help.
- Do not blame them. No-one chooses to be depressed.
- Always make a point of welcoming them back to work, but remember that they may not be able to instantly resume their original work capacity, but may need to ease their way back in.

Where to Get Help

- General Practitioner
- The firm's health adviser
- Psychiatric hospitals and clinics
- MIND* (National Mental Health Charity—0845 766 0163)
- LawCare – see the front of this document for numbers to call.

Are You Depressed?

It's common to get "the blues" from time to time. Many people experience such difficulties as job lay-offs, divorce, the death of a loved one or other major losses. Sadness is a normal part of life. But when sadness never returns to gladness, it becomes what mental health authorities call the nation's leading psychological problem: clinical depression. Try this quick quiz to help you distinguish between this illness and the more normal feelings of being "down in the dumps".

- 1.) Much of the time do you feel:
 - Sad?
 - Lethargic?
 - Pessimistic?
 - Hopeless?
 - Worthless?
- 2.) Much of the time do you:
 - Have difficulty making decisions?
 - Have trouble concentrating?
 - Have memory problems?
- 3.) Lately, have you:
 - Lost interest in things that used to give you pleasure?
 - Had problems at work or school?
 - Had problems with your family or friends?
 - Isolated yourself from others, or wanted to?
- 4.) Lately have you:
 - Felt restless and irritable?
 - Had trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or getting up in the morning?
 - Lost your appetite, or gained weight?
 - Been bothered by persistent headaches, stomach aches, muscle or joint pains?
- 5.) Lately have you:
 - Been drinking more alcohol than you used to?
 - Been taking more mood altering drugs than you used to?
 - Engaged in risky behaviour - crossing streets without looking?
- 6.) Lately have you been thinking about:
 - Death?
 - Hurting yourself?
 - Killing yourself?
 - Your funeral?

If you answer "yes" to more than two of these questions you may be depressed. See your GP. as soon as possible as it can be treated. Modern anti depressant drugs are very effective (although they take some weeks to start working) especially when taken in conjunction with regular counselling. With the right help life can be good again, you can come out of this dark abyss.

Beating Depression with the Three "A"s

While your GP should be your first port of call if you are suffering from depression, there are also steps you can take to change your way of thinking which may help in lifting your depression. These can be grouped under three A's as follows:-

Be Aware of your symptoms.

- ✓ Pay attention to your mood changes and note what is going on around you which leads to these changes. Understand why mood changes happen.
- ✓ Own your feelings, do not be afraid to admit how you are honestly feeling.
- ✓ Be aware of the symptoms of depression - loss of confidence and motivation, problems concentrating and making decisions. When you experience these, it is due to your illness.
- ✓ Automatic negative thoughts are common in depression - "I answered that one question badly so I blew the interview," "Everyone thinks I'm fat and ugly," "I always fail at everything I do." Recognise when you have these thoughts.

Answer negative thoughts

- ✓ Answer negative thoughts. Ask whether they'd stand up in a court of law. "I'm no good at anything." Look at the evidence and give yourself a fair trial before you convict yourself.
- ✓ Ask yourself whether you're thinking in "all-or-none" terms - thinking this way can make everything seem bad if it's not perfect! Almost everything in life is in degrees or on a continuum. That presentation may not have been brilliant, but it wasn't terrible either.
- ✓ Ask yourself how you might consider something if you weren't suffering from depression. Would you really think a cold sore was the end of the world?
- ✓ Look for the distortions in your thinking. How do you know what everyone else is thinking about you?
- ✓ Are you confusing a low probability with a high probability? "They'll fire me for missing three days at work" could become "When was the last time they fired anyone at this firm?"
- ✓ Are you focusing on irrelevant factors? Yes, third world famine and wars are tragic but, after you've done what you can to help, being depressed about it serves no purpose.

Act differently

- ✓ Focus on your strengths. Think carefully about what you are good at (ask a loved one if you need to), and concentrate on building that up. Take pleasure in your own ability.
- ✓ Think about your goals in life and work towards them. If you want to be happy and get the most out of your life, then negative thinking is not helping you to achieve that.
- ✓ Increase your involvement in positive activities which you enjoy - spending time with friends - and decrease your involvement in negative ones - resign from that dull committee!
- ✓ Take exercise. Find a sport which you enjoy and make time for it. Physical activity improves mood and counters the fatigue common in depression.
- ✓ Address problems. No one has a life free of difficulties, but try not to let them make you depressed. Identify the problem, consider various approaches, select the most promising approach and carry through. Apart from time set aside to specifically deal with the problem, don't let yourself dwell on it or feel overwhelmed and helpless. If you need outside help - from a debt counsellor, for example - then seek it without delay.

LAWCARE

What is LawCare?

LawCare is a registered charity formed in February 1997 and funded by the professional bodies of the various sectors and regions of the legal profession in the British Isles. Its primary purpose is to help lawyers and their staff who are impaired by alcohol and/or drug use or abuse, stress or depression and to prevent health, family and work related problems that will develop. The secondary purpose, but no less important, is to inform and educate the legal profession generally on the causes and consequences of such problems, and how to seek help for themselves or their colleagues.

What does LawCare offer?

- Early identification of impairment
- Preliminary assessment, basic telephone counselling and development of an appropriate treatment plan
- Information about the health issue
- Monitoring of recovery where appropriate
- Referral to relevant self-help groups, professional counselling and treatment organisations
- The services and friendship of a LawCare volunteer who is likely to be a solicitor or barrister who has recovered from a similar health problem
- Informational and educational presentations to interested firms, Chambers and organisations

What about confidentiality?

All communications with any member of LawCare's staff and volunteer helpers are completely confidential. LawCare reports nothing more than statistics to any outside agency, including its funders.

How does it work?

The freephone helplines are available from 9 a.m. to 7.30 p.m. on weekdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at weekends and UK Bank holidays. The numbers to call are on the front of this document. Information and help can also be obtained by e.mail to help@lawcare.org.uk. There is also a website where further information may be obtained on www.lawcare.org.uk.

Please note that neither LawCare staff nor volunteers are professional counsellors but lawyers, like you, with knowledge of counselling skills and of the nature of the impairments with which we assist.