

Factsheet: **Depression**

Depression is an illness, just as heart disease or diabetes are illnesses, and it is an illness that affects the entire body, not just the mind. One in five people will experience depression at some time in their life, and it's a major cause of alcohol and drug dependency. However, it can be successfully treated in the vast majority of cases. Depression is sometimes triggered by traumatic events or prolonged stress, but can happen to anyone and for no apparent reason.

Symptoms

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. If you are experiencing any of these symptoms seek help from your GP.

Treatment for Depression

Counselling

Counselling has been shown to be very effective in treating depression. Depression counselling should be future-orientated, time-limited and solution-focussed. Counselling is available on the NHS, although there may be a waiting list. Private counsellors can be found through groups such as the British Association for Counselling www.bacp.co.uk and Psychotherapy or United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Anti-Depressants

The most effective treatment is shown to be competently prescribed and monitored anti-depressant medication, coupled with regular counselling sessions.

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. It is important to be aware of any possible side-effects before you begin taking medication. Speak to your GP for more information about anti-depressants.

Alternative Treatment

For mild depression other treatments are recommended, and for those who prefer not to take medication these may help:

Exercise

Exercise raises mood as well as increasing fitness, and provides an outlet for negative feelings. Studies have shown 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, so enjoy your garden, local park or the countryside as much as possible.

Alternative Therapy

Alternative therapies such as reflexology homeopathy and herbal remedies may help too.

People and pets

Surround yourself with supportive people who like you. Pets can also be very helpful in providing company and reassurance.

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Treatment for Depression

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 to decluttering your life, anything which makes you feel relaxed could be beneficial.

Avoid Alcohol and Drugs

There is a tendency for some people with depression to drink more, in the belief that alcohol will help to relax them. However it is unwise to drink alcohol if you have depression, since alcohol is a depressant and will worsen your symptoms in the long term. It may also be contraindicated with your antidepressants - consuming alcohol may render medication less effective. Other harmful substances should also be avoided.

Self-Help Books

There are hundreds of books available which claim to help you manage depression yourself; for example, by teaching you to challenge your negative thoughts, forgive yourself or let go of the need to be perfect. These are complementary to other types of therapy, but can be helpful.