



**University  
Hospitals Sussex**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Staff Psychological Support Service

# Managing Depression

**For further information please contact us:**

Worthing, St. Richard's, Southlands Hospitals

01243 788122 Ext. 31624

Royal Sussex County, Brighton General, Princess Royal Hospitals

01273 696555 Ext. 63692

[uhsussex.staffpsychologicalsupport@nhs.net](mailto:uhsussex.staffpsychologicalsupport@nhs.net)

[Health and Wellbeing website](#)

## What is depression?

Depression is a persistent low mood that can last more than 2 weeks and can affect anyone throughout their life.

A mild form of depression can mean just being in low spirits, it doesn't stop you leading your normal life however it can make everyday living harder. At its most severe, depression can make you feel suicidal or feel like you simply want to give up the will to live.

## What causes depression?

It varies a lot between different people, and for some a combination of different factors may cause their depression. Some people find that they become depressed without any obvious reason. Some of the following factors may cause depression:

- Childhood experiences (abuse, neglect etc.)
- Life events (traumatic)
- Other mental health problems
- Physical health problems
- Genetic inheritance
- Alcohol, drugs, medication
- Sleep, diet and exercise

## When does low mood become depression?

We all have times when our mood is low, and we're feeling sad or miserable about life. Usually, these feelings pass in due course. But if the feelings are interfering with your life and don't go away after a couple of weeks, or if they come back repeatedly for a few days at a time, it could be a sign that you're experiencing depression.

## How you might feel:

- Upset or tearful, down, low
- Restless, irritable, agitated
- Guilty, worthless and down on yourself empty, numb
- Isolated, unable to relate to others
- Finding no pleasure in things you usually enjoy
- A sense of unreality
- Lacking self-confidence and/or self-esteem
- Hopelessness and despairing
- Suicidal

## How you might behave:

- Avoiding social events, activities you usually enjoy
- Self-harming or suicidal behaviour
- Finding it difficult to speak or think clearly
- Losing interest in sex
- Difficulty in remembering or concentrating on things
- Increase in smoking, drinking alcohol, or drug use
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Feeling fatigued all the time
- No appetite and losing weight or eating too much and gaining weight
- Physical aches and pains with no obvious physical cause
- Physical movements are slow or being restless and agitated

## What can I do to help myself?

Remember a time you experienced low mood in the past and what you did to make yourself better?

Having the energy to look after yourself whilst experiencing depression can

be difficult. By taking an active role in your treatment, taking steps to help yourself cope with your experiences, can make a big difference to how you feel. Here are some things you can try:

Practice self-care - sleep well, eat healthy foods, drink water, take daily showers, get dressed (even if you are not going out)

Keep active - exercise your mind and body with yoga or tai chi, go for a walk or swim. Draw, paint or sculpt, get creative

Challenge your low feelings - by listening to uplifting music, switch your use of negative words with positive ones, use daily affirmations and visualisations

Connect with others - call a friend/family member, go out to meet friends/family for breakfast/lunch/dinner, join a local support group. Just a reminder, if you don't feel like seeing people one to one, or talking to them, why not just send them a text to keep in touch. It may feel difficult to talk to family and friends about how/what you are feeling, but just by sharing your thoughts and feelings might help you feel better

**Create a resilience toolkit** - this could be a list of activities you know improve your mood, or you could fill an actual box with things to do to cheer yourself up. Try including your favourite book or film, a notebook and pen to write down your thoughts or notes of encouragement to yourself. It might feel difficult or a bit silly, but this can be a useful tool if you're feeling low to come up with ideas

Be kind to yourself - none of us achieve all our goals. Don't beat yourself up if you don't do something you planned to or find

yourself feeling worse again. Try to treat yourself as you would treat a friend and be kind to yourself.

Try volunteering - or just offering to help someone can make you feel better about yourself and feel less alone

Keeping a mood diary - can help you keep track of any changes in your mood, and you might find that you have more good days than you think. It can also help you notice if any activities, places or people make you feel better or worse


Avoid taking drugs and alcohol - try not to use drugs or alcohol to cope with any difficult feelings, in the long run they can make you feel worse

## Seeking Counselling/Psychotherapy

Seeking professional assistance when needed is a sign of strength. Working with a qualified psychotherapist, counsellor or other qualified mental health professional can be one way to learn how to manage depression.

## When to seek professional help

1. a) if you feel you cannot handle intense feeling or body sensations  
b) if you feel that your emotions are not falling into place over a period of time  
c) if you feel chronic tension, confusion, emptiness, or exhaustion  
d) if you continue to have disturbing bodily sensations/symptoms
2. If you continue to have nightmares and poor disturbed sleep
3. If you have no one you can share your emotions with

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4. If your relationships seem to be suffering or sexual problems develop
  5. If you have accidents or clumsy behaviour
  6. If you continue to smoke, drink, or take drugs to excess since the event
  7. If your work performance suffers
  8. If as a helper, you are suffering exhaustion