

## Depression

### *What is it?*

Everyone feels 'down in the dumps', sad or 'low' at some time. That is a normal part of life. People sometimes describe themselves as 'depressed' when what they mean is that they are feeling a bit down. Depression is where these feelings are severe, or long lasting.

When symptoms go on for more than two weeks, or if a person feels suicidal or has thoughts about suicide, medical help should be sought urgently.

Depression is increasingly common. Significant life events can trigger periods of depression...exam or work stress, family turmoil, or concerns around identity or sexual orientation are all types of thing that can be triggers. Hormonal changes, such as around adolescence, pregnancy or menopause can also contribute to depression.

### *Facts*

- People of all ages, backgrounds, lifestyles, and nationalities experience depression.
- Approximately 250,000 Scots have clinically significant depression at any one time<sup>1</sup>, and depression was the commonest reason for Scots visiting their GP in 2000.
- 40% more per head is spent on prescriptions for anti-depressants in Scotland than in England.
- 10 times more people have depression now than in 1945.<sup>2</sup> By 2020, depression will become the second most common disabling condition in the world after coronary heart disease.
- Most people with depression and get on with their lives. Many people learn a great deal about themselves having lived through an episode of depression.

### *Signs and Symptoms*

People who experience depression may:

- Have feelings of overwhelming sadness. They may be compounded by feel in guilty, worthless or hopeless. They may also feel anxious, tense, irrationally worried, and irritable.
- Lose interest and pleasure in things they would normally enjoy. They may have difficulty concentrating, making decisions or remembering things
- Have difficulty sleeping, waking early or not being able to fall asleep. They may feel very tired; have no energy to get out of bed. They may see experience change in appetite and lose/gain weight.
- Pay less attention to themselves, like forgetting to wash their hair or wearing clean clothes.
- Sometimes depression gets so severe that a person sees or hears things that are not there. These hallucinations or delusions usually reinforce feelings of guilt and worthlessness, or encourage suicidal thoughts.
- Have recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, self-harm, or make suicide attempts.

### *Recovery*

- There are many treatments for depression, from medication to complementary therapies to talking treatments. Often a combination of things works at different times.
- The key to recovery is finding what works, with the support of professionals. Often, talking treatments like counselling or therapies that help focus on positive achievements are a first step to recovery.
- Recovery means different things to different people and no two individual journeys of recovery will be the same. Regardless of symptoms or past experiences, people with mental health problems should be given every opportunity to, and can, lead fulfilling and satisfying lives.

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<sup>1</sup> From ISD (2003) and SCROL (2001) data

<sup>2</sup> Seligman et al (1982)

## ***Stigma and Depression***

- Depression is one of the most widely experienced mental health problems. Most people know somebody who has experienced depression.
- People who develop depression and take time off work are often labelled as weak, or letting the side down, by colleagues and managers. Declaring a past episode of depression in an application can result in discrimination, even when that episode occurs in the past.
- Friends, family and employers are often overprotective of people recovering from depression this may be well meaning, but it can feel suffocating, and may be picked up on by others and used in more intentional stigmatising behaviour. Just as it is not fair to expect someone to “snap out of it”, it is also vital to realise that people need their colleagues, friends and family to support and accept them.

## ***Myths and Misunderstandings***

- Having depression is not a sign of weakness. Living through depression often makes a person stronger, and more sensitive.
- People with depression are often asked what they have to be depressed about. Young people are told that “they have their lives ahead of them,” even though their feelings tell them that their life is over. That can prevent them seeking help, by reinforcing their feelings of guilt, and making recovery harder.
- Recovering from depression is not as simple as “pulling yourself together.” Hearing that is very hurtful, and can actually reinforce people’s feelings of worthlessness making their depression worse.

## ***Contacts***

### **Breathing Space**

[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk)

### **Depression Alliance Scotland**

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

### **Royal College of Psychiatrists Depression Information**

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info/dep.htm>

### **Young Minds Depression Information**

<http://www.youngminds.org.uk/depression/>

### **Depression.com**

<http://www.depression.com/>