

Disability Insight

Take a look around you

Mental Health - Depression

6th February 2020

Key points

- Depression is a common but treatable mental health issue affecting an estimated 350 million people worldwide
- In 2018, 1 in 9 adults in Northern Ireland were diagnosed with depression
- Depression affects how you feel, think and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physical symptoms including fatigue and social withdrawal
- The prominent feature of depression is low mood that persists over weeks or months and affects everyday life
- Different types of depression can develop such as postnatal depression and depression arising from bipolar disorder
- The condition affects people of all ages, racial/ethnic and economic groups, though may be more prevalent among particular demographics

1 About Depression

Most people will experience episodes of sadness, loss or anger at times, often in response to the things going on in our lives. Although challenging at the time, these episodes are often short lived. Depression however and the feelings associated with it can persist over weeks or months and interfere with work, social and family life. Depression can be described as a hidden illness as symptoms may not be immediately obvious to others. Depression can sometimes get trivialised, bunched in with small episodes of low mood or sadness as mentioned above, however depression can vary in severity, it is a diagnosable condition, and can have detrimental impacts on an individual's wellbeing. There are a number of physical, psychological and social symptoms that can affect people in different ways. These include:

- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Sleep issues e.g. insomnia or oversleeping

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- Changes in appetite or weight
- Difficulty concentrating, making decisions or remembering things
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches
- Anxiety, agitation or restlessness
- Feelings of sadness, emptiness or hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Lack of motivation or enjoyment in life
- Withdrawal from friends and social activities
- Reduced interest in hobbies and other valued activities

Someone experiencing these symptoms may feel inclined to just "tough it out" and wait until it passes. However, if you think you might be depressed you should see your GP as soon as possible as earlier treatment will lead to a quicker recovery. The GP can also rule out any other medical cause for your symptoms.

What are the causes of Depression?

There may be a number of factors that can lead to a person developing depression. Life-changing events, such as bereavement or giving birth can sometimes trigger depression. There is also a hereditary link meaning that people with a family history of depression are at increased risk of experiencing it themselves. Environmental factors such as money/relationship worries or physical illness can also increase the risk of depression. People with certain personality traits e.g. those with perfectionism tendencies may be more vulnerable to depression. In some cases, however, a person will develop depression for no obvious reason.

What treatments are available for Depression?

Treatment is based on the severity of depression and involves a combination of lifestyle changes, talking therapies and medication. With mild depression, a doctor may suggest waiting to see whether the condition improves by itself whilst monitoring progress (known as "watchful waiting"). They may also suggest lifestyle measures such as exercise and support groups. Talking therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), are often used for mild depression that is not improving, or moderate depression. Antidepressants may also be prescribed as part of a program of treatment.

2 How does Depression affect someone's life?

Depression can impact every area of life including career and education, physical health and relationships with others. Severity of depression, mild-to-severe, will be determined by the level of symptoms and impact it is having on daily functioning. As depression can often develop gradually a person may try to deal with their symptoms without seeking support. As a result some people may develop

unhealthy coping strategies such as using alcohol and drugs which can result in a spiral of depression and other negative outcomes. It can sometimes take a friend or family member to suggest something is wrong. Without proper support and/or treatment, symptoms can lead to physiological, physical and social withdrawal and avoidance of day to day activities. Please click on the link below to read a real life story of someone sharing their experience of depression

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories/depression-sharing-my-story/#.XiWdLWY3bcs>

3 Supporting someone with Depression in work

Awareness and support from colleagues and managers can make a considerable difference to the working life of someone with depression. This means being mindful of changes in behaviors and addressing these in a sensitive and confidential manner. It's important to listen to the employee and let them know they're a valued member of the team. You should encourage them to access support services e.g. Inspire and avoid using judgmental attitudes reflected in phrases such as 'pull yourself together' or 'can't you snap out of it'. Some reasonable adjustments that can be adopted include:

- Providing mental health first aiders who can give support in place of a manager
- Providing to-do lists and written instructions
- Providing memory aids, such as schedulers or organizers
- Providing sensitivity training to colleagues
- Providing information on counselling and employee support programs
- Allowing a self-paced workload or flexible work schedule
- Allowing flexible working hours and flexible use of leave time
- Allowing the employee to work from home

For an article on supporting a colleague with depression please follow the link below:

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/supporting-others/how-to-support-a-colleague-with-depression>

4 Support for you if you care for somebody with Depression

Depression affects not only the person living with the condition, but also their friends and family. If you're caring for someone with depression, your relationship and family life in general can become strained. You may find yourself becoming angry about what has happened and experience a sense of helplessness. Doing something practical to tackle the problems you face can help you to feel empowered. It's important to get advice & support by talking with people who are

in similar situations and understand some of the financial, emotional and social issues.

MindWise is an independent charity, whose work is driven by a desire to provide the best possible services and support for those affected by mental health issues. Services include support services for carers and self-management advice. Contact the Belfast Resource Centre on 028 9024 8006 Monday and Wednesday 9.30am–5.00pm, Tuesday and Thursday 10.00am–6.00pm and Friday 9.30am–4.00pm. To find out more about support groups for carers please click the link below:

http://www.mindwisenv.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=100

5 Support for you if you have Depression

Whilst it can be difficult to ask for help (men, in particular are less likely to ask for help and are also more likely to turn to alcohol or drugs when depressed), sharing a problem with someone else or with a group can give you support and an insight into your own depression. Research shows that talking can help people recover from depression and deal with stress better. Support groups provide an important network, allowing you to exchange coping strategies with people who may be in a similar situation. For information on support groups in your area please follow the link below:

<https://www.aware-ni.org/support-groups/>

Sources and further reading:

<https://www.aware-ni.org/>

<https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<https://www.inspirewellbeing.org/workplaces>

