

Disability Insight

Take a look around you

26th January 2015 – Focus on Depression

4 facts you need to know about depression

- Every year, 1 in 10 people will suffer from some form of depression.
- Depression can happen to anyone at any age. Many successful people battle with this problem.
- Half of the people who have depression will only experience it once.
- Talking may help.

About depression

Depression is different from feeling down or sad. We all feel unhappy at times, usually due to a particular cause. A person suffering from depression will experience intense emotions of anxiety, hopelessness, negativity and helplessness, and the feelings stay with them instead of going away. Doctors describe depression by how serious it is – mild, moderate or severe.

Depression can happen suddenly as a result of physical illness, experiences from childhood, unemployment, bereavement, family problems or other life changing events. Sometimes, there may be no clear reason for a person's depression.

The following are the most common **symptoms** of depression. If somebody experiences four or more of the symptoms listed below, for most of the day, every day for more than two weeks, they should seek help from a GP.

- Tiredness and loss of energy
- Sadness that does not go away
- Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem
- Difficulty concentrating
- Not being able to enjoy things that are usually pleasurable
- Feeling anxious all the time
- Avoiding other people, sometimes even your close friends

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- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Difficulties in getting off to sleep or waking up much earlier than usual
- Very strong feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Finding it hard to function at work/college/school
- Loss of appetite
- Loss of sex drive and/or sexual problems
- Physical aches and pains
- Self-harm
- Thinking about suicide and death.

How does depression affect a person?

Click on any of the links below to listen and read about people who live with depression and their experiences.

[Lawrence's story](#)

[Vanessa's story](#)

[Your stories](#)

How can you support a colleague who has depression?

It can be hard to know what to do when someone you work with has depression, but knowing how to support your colleague can make a huge difference to how they cope. Being more alert to signs and symptoms of depression is a first step. The most important thing you can do is to treat your colleague with respect and dignity.

Talking to your colleague may help though some people may not want to talk or may be too ill to do so. What you can do is to offer, to let them know that you are there if they want to talk.

Many people who have mental health problems dread returning to work after they have been off sick. Keeping in touch, such as sending a card or inviting them out when staff are spending leisure time together, may help overcome some of the barriers. Again, some people may not want contact or may be too ill to do so. Your colleague's privacy is a key concern you need to be mindful of at all times.

As a line manager, if your member of staff is on sick leave, it is key that you prepare for their return to work. Talking to your staff at an early stage is vital. Coming back to work after a period of sick leave due to mental ill health can be exhausting. The welcome, help and support the individual receives from you and your team is vital.

For further information visit the websites of the [Mental Health Foundation](#) and the [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#).

It is essential that you work closely with the individual and Human Resources to ensure that you provide appropriate support and meet the needs of the individual. Remember that you need to consider making reasonable adjustments.

How to look after your own mental health

There are five steps we can all take that may help to improve our mental wellbeing.

- **Connect** with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.
- **Be active.** Find the activity that you enjoy, and make it a part of your life.
- **Keep learning.** Learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence.
- **Give to others**, whether smaller acts (a smile, a thank you or a kind word) or larger acts (such as volunteering).
- **Take notice.** Be more aware of the present moment ('mindfulness'), including your feelings and thoughts, your body and the world around you. It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

You can find more information on Mindfulness on the [NHS Choices website](#).

What you can do to help yourself if you experience depression

When you are feeling depressed, you may not be feeling energetic or motivated and it may make you feel helpless. Taking action to make yourself feel more in control will have a positive effect, whether it is going to see your GP for treatment or do something to help manage your symptoms yourself. Some key points are:

- **How you see yourself:** Try to be aware of any negative thoughts you have about yourself and how they might be affecting how you see yourself and how you feel. If you can, try to think about how realistic these thoughts are and how you might change them into something more positive.
- **Physical activity and a healthy diet:** Both may help you recover from depression.
- **Avoid too much alcohol and drugs** and don't self-medicate.

- **Care for yourself:** You need to do things that will improve the way you feel about yourself. Allow yourself positive experiences and treats such as a long bath, a day out with a friend.
- **Connect with other people:** Although you may not feel like it, keeping in touch with people (whether a short phone call or text message) can help you feel a bit more grounded.

A range of treatments are available for depression. The first step in getting treatment is normally to visit your GP. Treatments include talking therapies, medication and complementary therapies. You can find further information on the websites of [NHS Choices](#) and the [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#).

If you care for a person who has depression: The websites of [Mind](#) and [Royal College of Psychiatrists](#) provide further information on how to cope as a carer.

Sources and further reading

www.mindingyourhead.info

www.aware-ni.org/

Mind (2012): Understanding depression.

Mind (2014): How to cope as a carer.

[Mental Health Foundation - Dealing with depression](#)

[Mental Health Foundation - What works for you? How to help colleagues through tough times.](#)

[NHS Depression](#)

[NHS Stress-Anxiety-Depression](#)

www.tacklementalhealth.org.uk

www.mindfulemployer.net/managers

Services that may help

www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/directory-services-help-improve-mental-health-and-emotional-wellbeing

[or](#)

www.mindingyourhead.info/services

[www.mindingyourhead.info/services](#)

The organisations listed in the above directories provide advice and support on a range of issues such as: alcohol, bereavement, drugs, eating disorders, gambling, housing, illness, money worries, relationships, self-harm, sexuality, stress, suicide, depression and abuse.



Northern Ireland
Blood Transfusion Service



Northern Ireland
Social Care Council

Patient and Client Council
Your voice in health and social care

NIPEC



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority

Northern Ireland
mdta
Medical & Dental Training Agency

NICALA
NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency
a voice for children

SBNI
Safeguarding Board
for Northern Ireland



Public Health
Agency



Business Services
Organisation



Health and Social
Care Board