Depression

Most of us feel fed up at some time in our lives, but these feelings are usually short lived and manageable. Sometimes these feelings can become severe and begin to impact on a person's ability to function, making life feel like a struggle.

Depression can affect a person’s ability to work, study, socialise and develop relationships. Student life is often billed as ‘the best days of your life’, and, whilst for some this may be true, many aspects of the higher education experience, such as living away from home, achieving high academic standards and coping with the general responsibilities of independent living, can be very stressful and some students may begin to experience depression.

Depression is likely to affect many of us—it is estimated that one in six of us will have a severe depressive episode at some time in our lives—yet it can feel like a lonely and isolated experience. For many people, feelings of depression will subside, however, many will need to seek support. The duration and severity of depression varies, for some it may last weeks or months and for others it will last for a year or more.

What is depression?

Sometimes depression is a reaction to a life event, such as the end of a relationship, bereavement or job loss. It is normal to experience a period of sadness after such events, but sometimes this sadness is prolonged, and may even affect someone more than the actual event that initially sparked the depression. Depression is not always caused by an event and can appear to come from nowhere. Someone may appear to others to have everything going for them and still experience a bout of depression. Depression is not a weakness or a character defect, it is an illness which affects someone’s mental and physical well-being.

Depression is usually thought to be characterised by feelings of sadness. However, for some people it can involve a complete numbness of all feelings.

The following are just some of the most common symptoms of depression:

- feelings of unhappiness that do not go away after a few weeks
- change in sleeping and/or eating habits
- frustration and anger at oneself and others
- suicidal thoughts
- avoiding other people and certain situations
possible misuse of alcohol, drugs and tobacco
- poor concentration, making it harder to study
- feelings of worthlessness and self-blame

Someone with depression may have one or more of these symptoms. It can be difficult to seek assistance since many people blame themselves for the way they are feeling and try to cope alone. However, research has shown that people who seek help are more likely to overcome depression, and within a shorter period of time than those people that try to cope alone.

**Some myths about depression—dispelled**

‘Only weak people get depressed.’ Anyone can experience depression and many of us will. Some well-known and very successful figures have coped with prolonged periods of depression.

‘You should pull your socks up.’ Depression is an illness and although some people can alter the way they react to events and feelings, it is not simply a matter of ‘cheering up’. Statements like this can add to the feelings of guilt and low self-esteem.

‘Have a drink and it will be all right.’ Alcohol is a depressant and, although a couple of drinks may be relaxing, it can actually result in someone feeling worse. Using alcohol over a long period of time will increase the feelings of depression.

All you need is Prozac.’ Anti-depressants have been shown to be effective in the treatment of depression for some people. If this is a treatment you would like to consider, you will need to see your GP. There are many anti-depressants on the market and your GP will need to consider your personal history when considering the appropriate one for you.

**What can I do to help myself?**

Most people recover from depression. There are some things that you can try and do yourself to lift your mood. However, it is not always possible to do this alone and you may need to approach someone for support.

- Try to do something that you enjoy and spend time with people rather than avoiding company. Isolation can increase the feelings of depression.
- Look after yourself. It can be tempting to try and find release from depression by using drugs, alcohol and tobacco. This may provide a temporary solution, but in the long term can bring its own problems.
• Research shows that aerobic exercise can help in raising mood as well as improving sleep patterns. Try to make some form of hard exercise, including vigorous walking, a part of your daily routine.
• Remember that depression is not a sign of weakness. Many of us will experience it at some time in our lives and with time it will go.
• If you have someone you feel comfortable talking to, tell them about it. They will probably want to be given the opportunity to help and listen.
• Some people find relaxation techniques and self-help books useful and there are several books on the market that give information on ways of overcoming depression. There are some useful web sites that given information on depression and natural as well as pharmaceutical remedies, but you need to be selective …
• Alternative medicines, such as aromatherapy and reflexology, have also helped some people with depression.

I think my friend is depressed, what can I do?

You may not be suffering from depression, but may be concerned about someone you care about or live with. If you have read this leaflet and think that some of the symptoms apply to someone you know, then it may be that they are depressed. Below are some of the things that you could think about doing to help.

Try not to be judgemental of them, or assume you know how they are feeling. Someone is more likely to open up if they feel that they are being listened to without judgement.

• Try and encourage them to do the things that they did prior to having depression, such as socialising, or taking exercise.
• Persist; a depressed person may take out the way they are feeling on those closest to them. It can be hard to care for someone if they do not appear to value your friendship. However, your friend may feel that they are not worthy of your friendship and try and push you away. Try not to be put off by this.
• It can be easy when trying to support someone to forget about yourself and your own mental well-being. Still take time to deal with your own emotions. It is not selfish to sometimes make yourself the priority.
• If you can, try to direct your friend to the appropriate support.
• You may need to seek support yourself as there may well be only so much you can do. If you are worried about another student or do not feel you are coping well with supporting a peer, then please contact one of the services outlined in
the next section. This is particularly important if you are concerned about someone taking their own life.

**Where can I get support?**

Although family and friends can be supportive, it is sometimes difficult to discuss personal issues with them. You may be concerned about worrying them, or think that they will not understand. You may want to consider seeking support from someone who is not directly involved in your life.

The University of Leicester Counselling Service offers free, confidential, non-judgemental counselling. Talking to someone who is not involved in your life can help you recognise patterns of behaviour and find your strengths.

Counselling appointments usually last 50 minutes and the number of appointments will be decided by you and your counsellor. You can arrange an appointment by contacting our receptionist by telephone on 0116 223 1780, fax on 0116 223 1269 or by Email at counselling@le.ac.uk, or you can call into reception at the Student Counselling Service, which is situated at the back of the Freemen’s Common Health Centre on Welford Road. We have a separate entrance up a slight ramp.

Your GP may be able to help by prescribing anti-depressant drugs or possibly referring you to counselling or other support services. Some people find anti-depressants helpful in elevating their depression to a level where they feel able to tackle the cause. If you are prescribed anti-depressants you may not see any substantial improvement in mood for several weeks. They are not an overnight cure. It is important to keep your GP informed about any other medication you are taking, your medical history and any side effects you may experience.

**Student Support (Mental Wellbeing)**

Hilary Craig & Becky Talbott, Mental Wellbeing Advisers  
T: 0116 252 2283 (Hilary)  
T: 0116 229 7751 (Becky)  
E: mentalhealth@le.ac.uk  
[www.le.ac.uk/ssds/mentalwellbeing/index.html](http://www.le.ac.uk/ssds/mentalwellbeing/index.html)

**The Samaritans**

Local telephone number: 0116 270 0007  
National telephone number: 08457 90 90 90  
jo@samaritans.org
MIND (National Association for Mental Health) has an information line on 0300 123 33 93 (helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 6.00pm)
E: info@mind.org.uk

Victoria Park Health Centre
203 Victoria Park road, Leicester, LE2 1XD
0116 2151105
http://www.victoriaparkhealthcentre.co.uk/

Nightline - 8pm to 8am in term time
0116 223 1230

Students Against Depression
www.studentdepression.org

The Student Support Services (SSS)
have a web page for other student services that can provide information and assistance for a wide range of issues.

www.le.ac.uk/ssds
We would like to thank University of Teesside for allowing us to adapt their student leaflets, on which this information on Depression was based.

Where to find the Counselling and Wellbeing

Our entrance is at the rear of the building located directly on the junction of University Road and Welford Road. We have a ramp and there is a large sign on the wall. The building is accessible to wheelchair users.

Contact Details

Counselling and Wellbeing
University of Leicester
161 Welford Road
Leicester
LE2 6BF

T: 0116 223 1780
F: 0116 223 1269

www.le.ac.uk/counselling

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