

# Depression



A broad term to describe a range of experiences from transient lowness of spirits through to a suicidal state. Depression is an affective disorder. 'Affect' refers to mood, ie in depression, individuals lose interest or pleasure in nearly all activities. The symptoms cause distress and impair social and occupational functioning and also put strain on personal relationships. Depression is a serious problem when severe and/or prolonged. An individual cannot bring themselves out of it and mood is not elevated by pleasant happenings.

Typically depression may be first experienced in adolescence or early adulthood. Women appear more likely to develop depression than men especially in adolescence. It can also occur in later adulthood.

## Psychological symptoms

- Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day. Often described as down in the dumps, sad, discouraged, depressed.
- Decreased interest or loss of pleasure in most activities
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive and inappropriate guilt, eg may see trivial day to day events as evidence of personal defects or ruminate over minor past failings
- Negative thoughts; individuals tend to see themselves, the world and future negatively.
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicidal ideation without a specific plan
- Tearfulness or inability to cry
- Diminished ability to think, concentrate or indecisiveness - may have memory difficulties.
- Many report increased irritability, eg blaming others, persistent anger, frustration.
- Reduced level of sexual desire.

## Behavioural symptoms

- Lack of interest in taking part in activities that were previously enjoyable/pleasurable
- Social withdrawal due to loss of motivation and interest, and perceive that others may not want to be around them.
- Reduced efficiency in performing tasks, eg individuals may complain that washing and dressing in the morning are exhausting and take twice as long.

## Physiological symptoms

- Change in appetite and/or weight
- Problems sleeping, eg trouble getting to sleep, waking in the night, difficulty returning to sleep, early morning awakening, oversleeping
- Lethargy/fatigue, decreased energy
- Loss of libido
- Somatic symptoms, eg bodily aches or pains
- Psychomotor changes, eg agitation - unable to sit still, pacing, handwringing, pulling or rubbing the skin, clothing or other objects); slowed speech, thinking and body movements, speech decreased in volume, inflection, content

## Treatment

Usually by counselling/therapy and/or anti-depressant medication.