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**Coping with depression**

What to look out for and how to cope with it



Most of us feel down from time to time and saying that you are ‘depressed’ has become a common buzz word. For those of you who suffer with depression, however, know that it isn’t something to be taken lightly. Depressive moods can sweep over us for no apparent reason leaving you feeling unhappy but puzzled as to why. Usually there has been a build-up of stressful situations that have previously gone unnoticed..

If you aren’t enjoying the activities in life that you used to enjoy or if you have felt prolonged sadness for sometime now there is a chance that you are suffering from depression on some level.

Feeling depressed doesn’t always make sense and we don’t always know the reasons why. To help you to understand why you feel the way you do, have a read of the following:

* Depression can run in families and it can quite often be a way we have learnt how to deal with life.
* Problems from childhood can leave us feeling irrationally sad and hopeless. You may have suffered neglect, abuse (verbal, emotional, physical or sexual) or were bullied at school.
* Going through a period of high-stress e.g. a bereavement, pressure at college, a relationship break-up.
* Usually there are many factors involving depression which may involve all of the above three points. Talking to a counsellor can help you to understand the many factors affecting how you feel to enable you to explore your options and make changes.

**There are many signs and symptoms of depression,** here are a few:

* You feel sad, withdrawn and less interested in the things you used to enjoy
* You are worried and anxious more than usual
* You are critical of yourself and the way you look
* You are eating and sleeping much more, or much less, than in the past
* You are harming yourself (for example, drinking too much or taking too many drugs, cutting yourself or intentionally putting yourself in dangerous or risky situations)
* You feel angry and have acted aggressively
* You feel confused and are acting in unfamiliar ways
* You find you are avoiding college, work or social situations

If you feel like you suffer from depression, there are many strategies that you can put in place in order to help yourself. The key is, to do things that make you feel good. It is important that these ‘feel good’ activities will help make you feel good in the long-term and not just the short-term. Short-term ‘feel good’ activities such as comfort eating, drinking, smoking or taking drugs only lead to addictions and further problems. Long-term ‘feel good’ activities build up your ‘feel good’ bank account so when your moods dip, you’ll have enough ‘feel good’ feelings within you to support you.

‘Feel good’ strategies:

* Eat regular meals starting your day with breakfast. This helps to keep your blood/sugar levels in balance preventing mood swings.
* A regular sleeping pattern also helps to stabilise moods as both under-sleeping and over-sleeping can cause lethargy, irritability and a decrease in concentration.
* Spending time with friends. You may have some friends who you can confide in, some friends that make you laugh, some who are adventurous, and others who have a calming influence. Write a list of all your friends and next to each list the qualities that they bring into the friendship. When you are feeling down it is important to know who the right person is to turn to.
* Listening to music or playing a musical instrument can help to regulate emotions and take your mind of things.
* Exercising helps to boost levels of serotonin in the brain helping with the smooth running of the central nervous system which can help with mood swings.
* Being in nature is known to increase levels of well-being whether that’s sitting, taking a walk or doing gardening.

Depression ranges from mild to chronic and at its most extreme, thoughts of suicide are common. If this is the case it is important for you to contact your GP or make an appointment to see one of the Student Counsellors at the college.

**The Samaritans run a confidential 24 hour helpline – 08457 909090 or email: jo@Samaritans.org**

**To contact the Counselling Service (term-time only)**

**Bedfordshire**

01234 291911

counselling@bedford.ac.uk

**Northamptonshire**

01536 513273

Counsellingtresham@bedford.ac.uk

You also drop in to Student Services or speak to your Personal Achievement Tutor