



# Understanding... Depression

Almost every one of us feels fed up at some time in our lives, but these feelings are usually short lived and manageable. However, 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. Depression affects many people - it is estimated that one in six people will be depressed at some time in their lives - yet it can feel like a lonely and isolated experience.

## **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 yet still experience a bout of depression.

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:

- Getting into fights or arguments
- Feelings of unhappiness that do not go away after a few weeks
- Change in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Poor concentration, making it harder to study
- Frustration and anger at self and others
- Avoiding other people and certain situations
- Feeling completely alone and isolated
- Possible misuse of alcohol, drugs and tobacco
- Feelings of worthlessness and that 'it's all your fault'
- Suicidal thoughts

Someone with depression may have one or more of these symptoms.

*Continued overleaf*

The duration and severity of depression varies, for some it may last weeks or months and for others it will last a year or more. For many people, feelings of depression will subside, however some will need to seek support. It can be difficult to seek assistance since some people blame themselves for the way they are feeling and try to cope alone. However, research shows that people who seek help are likely to overcome depression quicker than those who try to cope alone.

## Helping Yourself

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:

- Spend time with people rather than avoiding company. Isolation can increase the feelings of depression.
- Look after yourself. Regular exercise has been shown by research to help lift depression.
- It can be tempting to try and find release by overusing drugs, alcohol and tobacco. This may provide a temporary solution but in the long term can bring its own problems by causing depression.
- Remember that depression is not a sign of weakness. Many of us will experience it at sometime in our lives and with time, and the necessary support, it will decrease.
- 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.
- The Student Support Team provide free and confidential counselling and support. Talking to someone who is not involved in your life can help you to recognise patterns of behaviour and find your strengths.
- There are also sources of support on the telephone and on the web – if you would prefer to speak to someone in that way.

- Your doctor/GP can help by referring you for counselling or to other support services or by prescribing anti-depressants.

Details of sources of support are listed at the end of this leaflet.

## Helping Others

You may not have depression yourself, 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 judgmental, or to assume you know how they are feeling. They are more likely to open up if they feel that they are being listened to without judgment.
- Try and encourage them to do the things that they did prior to having depression.
- Persist - a depressed person may take out their feelings 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 to push you away. Try not to be put off by this.
- If you can try to signpost your friend to appropriate support.
- It can be easy when trying to support someone to forget about yourself and your own mental wellbeing. Take some time to deal with your own emotions. It is not selfish to sometimes make yourself a priority.
- You may need to seek support yourself - there is 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.

## GETTING SUPPORT

### In the University:

You can talk confidentially to the Dean of Student Affairs or other members of the Student Support Team.

Email: [student.support@ncl.edu.my](mailto:student.support@ncl.edu.my)

Webform: [studentsupport.newcastle.edu.my](http://studentsupport.newcastle.edu.my)

Or make an appointment at the Student Office.

### Outside the University:

Your GP or family doctor can be a useful first point of contact. In some cases, your doctor will refer you for more specialised help and support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to someone over the phone.

### The Befrienders Johor Bahru

The Befrienders offers confidential emotional support through a helpline and email service.

Helpline (1pm to 12am): 07 33 123 00

Email: [sam@befriendersjb.org](mailto:sam@befriendersjb.org)

Website: <http://www.befriendersjb.org/>

### Hospital Permai

Trunk Line/Operator: 07 231 1000

Emergency (BDM): 07 231 1170

## URGENT HELP OR SUPPORT

### Emergency Services

If you are worried about your safety or feel at risk of harming yourself, or if you are worried about the safety of a fellow student, you need to access help immediately.

If you feel your life is in imminent danger, you should call 999 or go to Accident and Emergency at the nearest hospital.

For emergencies on campus, call NUMed Security. NUMed Security (24/7): 07 555 3881/3984/3985

### Out-of-Hours Help

Out-of-hours on weekdays and on week-ends, you may call the NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day emergency number.

NUMed Senior Officer-of-the-Day: 011 1231 1276

