

What can I do if I feel LOW OR DEPRESSED?



Why is feeling low or depressed important to talk about?

We know that people can feel low in mood or depressed when they, or someone they are close to, is diagnosed with and living with a physical health condition, if they are facing difficult medical decisions (e.g. antenatally), or if they are dealing with traumatic physical events or bereavement. It's understandable why managing living with the consequences of these situations can make us feel low, e.g. not feeling well enough to engage in the things we would like to be doing or normal daily routines being disrupted by unexpected hospital admissions. However, there are many things that you and those around you can do to help to reduce these unpleasant feelings.



What is the impact of improving my mood?

When we are feeling low in mood or depressed, we may do (or not do!) certain things which are not so helpful for us in the longer term. For instance, when someone is feeling depressed, they may stop doing things they previously enjoyed and valued. We also know that when people no longer feel depressed, their physical health can improve, for instance improvements in experience of chronic pain.

How can you use this toolkit?

This toolkit is designed to provide you with information about some of the symptoms of low mood and depression and also provides some techniques that you can use to help you improve your mood. At the end of the toolkit there are also links to further information if you wish to explore this area in more detail and gain more support to do so.

There can be many reasons for someone feeling low or depressed, such as relationship breakdown, unemployment or moving house. It is also common for people to feel low or depressed when they are living with a health

condition, are facing big changes in their lives (such as during pregnancy), they have experienced something traumatic or have been bereaved.

There are many symptoms of low mood or depression, some common signs are listed below, perhaps you can think of some others that you have noticed:

1. Thoughts

- Self-critical "I'm no good"
- Hopeless "what's the point?"
- Focusing on past or future; less present moment focus

2. Feelings

- Sad, numb
- Mood swings
- Disconnected with things previously emotive

3. Physical sensations

- Fatigue, feeling 'flat'
- Pain
- Weight change

4. Behaviours

- Sleep difficulties
- Doing less social and/or physical activity
- Lack of enjoyment in things you previously found enjoyable

Top tips and strategies

It is very normal to have times where you feel a bit down, or don't feel in the mood to do something. However, if you notice those feelings are getting in the way of you doing what you need and want to do, and last for about two weeks or more, then it may be helpful to try some of the strategies below:

1 **Keep a diary or log of times when your mood is better or worse** and what you were doing at that time. Getting a pattern of what's helpful to improve your mood can be a good way of planning ahead and having ideas to hand to use when you notice that you are feeling low.

2 Very often when our mood is low, we do less activity, which maintains our low mood. **Try to break this negative cycle** by doing something active – this could be going for a short walk, or getting outside for some fresh air, or listening to a favourite song.

3 **Write down a negative thought when it comes into your mind and try to evaluate how accurate or helpful it is by asking yourself a few questions:**

- "Is this thought a fact?"
- "Is it true in all situations all of the time?"
- "Am I 'mind reading' others or making predictions into the future based on how I feel rather than using objective evidence?"
- "Is this thought helping me to connect more with what's important to me, or taking me further away from it?"
- "What would I say to a loved one if they were in the same position as me?"

Generating alternative, more helpful and balanced thoughts can be a useful way of managing unpleasant negative thoughts to help improve our mood.

4 **Use your helpful strategies to plan in regular times throughout your week** where you know you can be engaged in something enjoyable and meaningful for you. Focus on what is important to you and what you value, e.g. family and friends, creativity.

5 **Speak to someone you feel comfortable with**, this may be someone you know, or a professional (see below for more information). This can be a helpful way of improving your mood as talking through difficulties can help you to feel a sense of relief and the other person may be able to help you with some of the thought evaluation strategies above.



WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

1 Speak to your healthcare team if you feel concerned about your condition or other things that may be going on in your life – they may be able to direct you to services where you can access guidance and support.

2 Some teams in the hospital have a psychologist and/or counsellor as a member of their team, who can speak to patients and their families if they feel low or depressed – ask a member of your healthcare team who knows you well, such as your clinical nurse specialist, if they can make a referral on your behalf.

3 If you are a patient or family member of a patient of the Bristol Haematology and Oncology Centre (BHOC) there is an information and support centre in the main entrance which has lots of leaflets which can help you if you need some more information and advice, there are also counsellors who can speak to you individually to offer further support.

4 There are additional toolkits on the UH Bristol website for managing common concerns, such as overcoming stress, insomnia and low mood, please refer to these guides for more information and support.

Links to appropriate resources

1. Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust have created a self-help guide for managing anxiety, which includes more information and coping techniques that you can use

Anxiety: <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/leaflets/Anxiety%20A4%202016%20FINAL.pdf>

2. King's College Hospital NHS Foundation trust has developed a range of self-help materials designed for people who have been affected by health conditions. These include:

Living with health problems: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/depts/pm/research/impacts/Quick-links/Self-Help-Materials/Living-with-Health-Problems.pdf>

The mind-body link: <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/depts/pm/research/impacts/Quick-links/Self-Help-Materials/Mind-Body-Link.pdf>

3. Moodjuice' website and downloadable self-help guides are produced by Choose Life Falkirk and the Adult Clinical Psychology Service, NHS Forth Valley. There are various guides for improving wellbeing, including managing anxiety: www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp



These toolkits have been written by NHS clinical psychologists and neuropsychologists working for University Hospitals Bristol. They have been co-designed with service users and healthcare staff. These toolkits are only intended to provide general advice and information. Please discuss your individual needs with your doctor or specialist nurse. If you would like more information about psychology services please go to:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/>

We would like to thank patients and other healthcare staff for their contributions to this toolkit.

For access to other patient toolkits please go to the following address:

<http://www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/support-for-patients/psychological-health-services/resources/>

For this leaflet in large print, audio or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk

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