

Are you struggling?

A booklet for people living with a rheumatological condition



Depression is common in people who are living with a rheumatological conditions. It can make you feel hopeless and see things negatively. It is important to remember that these thoughts and feelings are part of depression, and that there is hope.

There are lots of things you can do that will make a difference, and help is at hand if you need it. This booklet contains lots of advice. Reading it will also help family members and friends to understand depression better.

Overcoming depression will help you to get on with living your life, doing the things which are important to you, and taking care of your health.

Living with a health problem can be hard. You may be in pain, have trouble getting about and be unable to do everything you would like to do. You may also be worried about the future and have difficult decisions to make about treatment. You may be fed up with coming to the hospital and having to rely on health professionals. All of this can get you down. Most people will have days when they feel really fed up. If you are feeling this way most days for several weeks or more, it may be that you are depressed and will find this booklet particularly useful.

If you think you might need more help than a booklet like this can provide, speak to your health professional about the other options which are available.

What are the signs of depression

You might feel...

- Sad, low, weepy, guilty, despairing, overwhelmed or numb
- Fed up and irritable, and snap at those closest to you
- Lonely, even when you are with other people
- Particularly low in the morning
- Tired all the time
- Preoccupied and find it hard to enjoy things
- Hopeless about the future.

You might also...

- Find it hard to get out of bed and to get going
- Be restless and unable to settle to anything
- Have trouble with your concentration or memory
- Eat and sleep more or less than usual
- Stopping seeing people and doing things you enjoy
- Lack confidence in yourself
- Be harsh on yourself and think that you are not good enough
- Think negatively about the world in general
- Have thoughts about harming yourself.

Some of these signs might be hard to tell apart from the symptoms of your health problem, or side effects from your medication.

If you think you are in danger of acting on thoughts of harming yourself, do ask for help, from your GP, other health professional, or at A&E.

What causes depression?

Depression is often triggered by a stressful event or situation, such as physical illness. Some people seem to be more vulnerable to depression than others. This can be explained by differences in the chemistry of the brain and the body, (such as your hormones), or differences in the way we think about life and cope with stressful situations. What happens to us early in our lives can make us more vulnerable to depression later on.

Once depression has started, it can be kept going by **vicious cycles** of thoughts, feelings and choices.

Depression makes it hard to get going, so you might not feel like doing much. In the beginning, you probably won't feel like doing the things that will help you. It is important to make a commitment to do them anyway.

Depression makes you think negatively, so you might believe nothing will make a difference, or that you are not worth bothering about. Remember that these thoughts are part of the depression and are not true.

Depression also tends to make your thoughts go round and round in circles. You might think that, if you do this for long enough, you will find some answers. On the other hand, being lost in thought makes it hard to take positive action.

Depression often makes you harsh on yourself, so you might blame yourself for things which are part of the depression, such as problems with concentration. Punishing yourself wastes energy which you could use in more positive ways.

Think about how you might encourage someone else, such as a child, to carry out a difficult task. Shouting at them wouldn't help. In fact, it would probably upset them or make them angry, and make them less likely to carry on with the task. Gently, but firmly, encouraging them would work better. You can do this for yourself, too. For example, you might calmly say to yourself:

You can do this. Just keep on going and you'll get there.

This booklet offers some ideas for breaking these vicious cycles. This won't be easy, and it will take some time and patience. Take things one step at a time.

Taking care of yourself

Try to eat a well-balanced diet. Take regular exercise if you can. Think of an activity which is manageable for you and which you might enjoy. You might need to take this quite slowly.

Eating well and keeping active can lift your mood, as well as improving your physical well-being.

Allow yourself enough time for sleep and rest, but try not to worry if you are not sleeping well. Having a regular bedtime, and allowing time to wind down before bed, can help.

Try to resist any temptation to have a few alcoholic drinks. This will only make you feel worse in the long run.

Talking to someone

When you are depressed, you might not feel like talking, but telling someone you trust how you are feeling can really help. You might want to let them know that they can help you just by spending some time with you and listening. They may also be able to help you put some of the other ideas in this booklet into practice.

Expressing your feelings in other ways, such as writing, can also be helpful.

Planning how you spend your time

You might find it helpful to draw up a plan for the week ahead, including:

- Things you need to do, such as picking up children from school.
- Things which are important to you and will give you a sense of achievement. Break big tasks down into smaller chunks. For example, if you want to sort out a pile of paperwork, you might make a start on this by spending twenty minutes on it each day.
- Things which you might enjoy. This might include things you have enjoyed in the past and new things you would like to try.
- Time spent with people whose company you like.
- Time to rest.

It's good to start gradually and build up what you are doing over time.

Pace yourself realistically, taking into account both your health problem and your depression. For example, you might need to take things more slowly than you have done in the past, to take more breaks, or to switch between one task and another, so that you do not spend too long doing one thing. Think creatively about how you might do something in a way that makes it more manageable. Think about what might get in the way of you doing something, and plan ways round these barriers.

Give yourself credit for what you do, even if it seems quite small.

Depression and thinking

When we are depressed, negative thoughts tend to pop into our minds. It is useful to recognize these and to remember that they are part of the depression, not helpful and generally not true.

These are some of the kinds of thoughts that are most common in depression, with examples:

Predicting the future	<i>I'm always going to feel this bad.</i>
Thinking the worst	<i>My boss wasn't happy with my work today. I'm going to lose my job.</i>
Mind reading	<i>She must think I'm a complete idiot.</i>
Taking things personally	<i>John was quiet today. I must have done something to annoy him.</i>
"Should" thoughts	<i>People on the bus should see that I'm struggling and offer me a seat without me needing to ask.</i>
Overgeneralising	<i>I didn't know the answer to that question. I am so stupid.</i>

Dismissing the positive

Anne said it was good to see me. She was just being polite.

Useful questions to ask yourself (with examples)

Is there any evidence against this thought?

When you feel very bad, physically or emotionally, it is easy to imagine that it will go on for ever. However, you might remember that you have had bad times like this in the past, and that things have got better. You might also know of things you can do that will help you feel a little better.

Is there anything I can do about this problem?

If your boss wasn't happy with a piece of work you have done, it might help to talk to her about what you could do differently next time.

Is there another way of thinking about the situation?

John might have been quiet because something completely different was on his mind.

How helpful is it to think this way?

You might think it's reasonable to expect someone to offer you their seat on the bus, when it seems obvious you are in pain. However, standing there getting more and more wound up, and more and more tense, will not help. Even if you think you shouldn't have to, it will probably be more helpful to say something like *I'm sorry to trouble you, but standing gives me a lot of pain. Please could someone let me sit down?*

What would you say to a friend?

It's unlikely you would tell a friend he was stupid just because he got one question wrong. You might say it was a difficult question, or that it was on a subject that he didn't know much about.

In particular, depression can make you think more negatively about your health problem. For example, on days when your pain is particularly bad, you might think that you can't cope with the pain, that it is just going to get worse, and that you are not going to be able to do the things you need to do. All of this thinking, and the sadness and fear that might go with it, can happen without you really noticing. It can then make you focus more on the pain, making it feel worse, and making the negative thoughts even stronger. To break this cycle, it can help to notice these thoughts, and to ask yourself the questions above.

Recognising your good qualities and what you achieve

Depression makes it hard to notice and remember good things. It is a bit like wearing distorting glasses, which make the difficult aspects of life and the mistakes

you have made very clear, but make it hard to see the good things, and the things you achieve every day.

We all make mistakes, and it is important to learn from them, rather than punishing ourselves for them, and to give ourselves credit for our strengths and achievements. One way of doing this is to make a list of your good qualities and things you:

- Achieve
- Have done even though they were difficult
- Are good at
- Know a lot about
- Can help others with.

You can include compliments you have been given and anything that shows you have been appreciated.

Don't set the standard too high. For example, being a good listener does not mean you need to be ready to listen to your friends' troubles 100% of the time, even if you are feeling really low or in pain.

Keep your list, so that you can look back at it when your negative thoughts are strong. You can add to it over time.

Further reading

The following books were written by experts on depression and are good places to find further advice.

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy by David Burns (published 2000)

Overcoming Depression: A guide to recovery with a complete self-help programme by Paul Gilbert (published 2009)

Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think by Dennis Greenberger and Christine Padesky (published 1995)

Overcoming Depression and Low Mood: A Five Areas Approach by Chris Williams (published 2009)

The Mindful Way Through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness by Mark Williams, John Teasdale, Zindel Segal & Jon Kabat Zinn (published 2007).

The next step

Choose where you will start with putting the ideas in this booklet into practice. Write this down, and keep it somewhere where you will see it, such as on your fridge or in your wallet. Set a date when you will review how you are doing and think about what to do next. Remember to be patient, to take one step at a time, and to be realistic about what is manageable. Be kind and encouraging to yourself, and give yourself credit when you take a step forward. Good luck!

PALS

King's Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

This is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

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www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/depts/pm/research/imparts/Self-help-materials.aspx