Depression

A self-help booklet

This booklet contains information on....

• Identifying whether you are experiencing symptoms of low mood

• What is low mood, what causes it and what sustains it

• Understand how to manage and overcome low mood
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Everyone has moments in their life where they are feeling ‘low’ or ‘down in the dumps’. However, these feelings are usually short-lived, and disappear within a few days. **Depression** is fundamentally a more **extreme form of these feelings**, which can **interfere with daily life**. Depression is normally defined when these feelings occur for a consistent, extended time period.

Depression may be **mild**, **moderate** or **severe** and can affect many aspects of life including relationships, work and enjoyment in everyday activities.

When depressed, people can experience three ‘**core**’ symptoms. ‘Mild’ depression is clinically diagnosed when two of these core symptoms are experienced:

- **Feel persistently sad, anxious, low or empty**
  Everyone is different. You may feel a combination of these 4 sensations, or maybe just one.

- **Find they have a loss of interest and enjoyment**
  When feeling like this, you may have **low motivation** and thoughts such as, ‘I can’t be bothered’, or ‘What’s the point’ about things you used to enjoy.

- **Find they have decreased energy**
  Finding yourself unable to get up at the usual time, or too lethargic to complete normal everyday tasks.
  Finding you are less able to maintain your normal energy...
Alongside the core symptoms, there are various ‘associated’ symptoms that you may experience:

- **Trouble falling or staying asleep**

- **Sleeping too much**

- **Loss of appetite, or over-eating**

- **Feeling increasingly irritable, tearful and lonely**

  Crying has a functional purpose, and can be helpful to feel better. However, when tearfulness starts to occur frequently, or for no particular reason – this could be a sign of depression. Alternatively sometimes people find that they can’t cry when they usually expect to.

- **Concentration and memory is poor**

  Finding it hard to read a newspaper, or watch television.

- **Feel cut-off from others**
In our modern day life, the importance of having control over all aspects of our life is highlighted. However, lots of things in our world cannot be controlled. So when things don’t go to plan, and we are unable to stop it, it can leave us vulnerable to feelings of helplessness.

Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
When feeling depressed, some people tend to carry out harsh self-judgment, and inappropriately blame themselves for experiences that are largely not their fault, e.g. failing to meet unrealistic standards.

Feeling helpless
In our modern day life, the importance of having control over all aspects of our life is highlighted. However, lots of things in our world cannot be controlled. So when things don’t go to plan, and we are unable to stop it, it can leave us vulnerable to feelings of helplessness.

Feeling bleak, hopeless and pessimistic

Feeling bad about yourself- or that you are a failure

Reduced self-esteem and self-confidence

Ideas or acts of self-harm or suicide
According to the NICE Guidelines, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is the treatment of choice for the psychological treatment of depression.

CBT focuses on the **present moment** – specifically how you think about yourself, the world and other people. CBT aims to improve your state of mind, based on the principle that **what you do can affect your thoughts and feelings**.

CBT breaks down overwhelming problems into smaller parts. This allows you to see how the parts are connected, and how the problems are affecting you. Each problem can be broken down into:

- **Thoughts**
- **Emotional sensations**
- **Physical sensations**
- **Behaviour**

For instance, how you think about a problem can affect how you feel physically and emotionally. Usually, there are helpful and unhelpful ways of reacting to most situations. Here is an example.

**Situation:** My friend hasn’t called when they said they would.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unhelpful reactions</th>
<th>Helpful reactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thoughts</strong></td>
<td>They don’t like me anymore</td>
<td>They probably forgot or were busy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotions</strong></td>
<td>Rejected, low, upset, angry</td>
<td>Curiosity, concerned for the other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical sensations</strong></td>
<td>Agitation, sluggish, lethargic</td>
<td>Energised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action/ Behaviour</strong></td>
<td>Avoid them</td>
<td>Give them a ring</td>
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Symptoms can be categorised into four elements:

**Behaviour patterns**
- Spending more and more time alone  
- Staying in bed longer than usual  
- Not getting things done at work/school  
- Keeping to yourself  
- Stopped doing the things you enjoy  
- Eat more or less

**Unhelpful Thoughts, for example:**
- ‘No-one likes me’  
- ‘I’m a waste of space’  
- ‘I can’t be bothered’  
- ‘It’s not worth going on’  
- ‘Things will never change’  
- ‘I’m no good’

You may notice other unhelpful thoughts that are not included in this list. It may be helpful to write down a list of the thoughts you may have.

**Physical Sensations**
- Poor concentration  
- Poor memory  
- Lack of libido  
- Sluggish  
- Lethargic/lacking in energy  
- Sleeping too much/too little  
- Aches and pains  
- Agitation

**Emotional symptoms**
- Sad/ Low/ Flat  
- Miserable  
- Tearful  
- Lonely  
- Upset  
- Irritable  
- Unmotivated  
- Feeling helpless  
- Low motivated  
- Guilt  
- Feeling hopeless
When feeling depressed, the way you think can affect the way you feel. What happens in one of these areas affects all the others. This can create a vicious cycle of depression.

This resource pack will focus on breaking down depression into these different areas, giving you information and guidance on how to manage each area, which will hopefully help tackle depression as a whole.

There are several interlinked factors that can cause depression. These include:

- Life events
- Behaviours
- Thoughts

Things to think about whilst reading this resource booklet:

- How is depression affecting your:
  - Daily living
  - Emotional wellbeing
  - Functioning
Most of us experience highs and lows in our life, which can lead us to feel unhappy, depressed, stressed or anxious during these difficult periods. This is a normal aspect of life. Some significant life events may make us feel particularly low.

These may include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological</th>
<th>Illness</th>
<th>Medications</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement</td>
<td>Infectious diseases</td>
<td>Antihypertensives</td>
<td>Family history of depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship problems</td>
<td>Influenza/ hepatitis</td>
<td>H2 blockers</td>
<td>Childbirth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>Chronic medical conditions</td>
<td>Oral contraceptives</td>
<td>Menopause</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moving house</td>
<td>Alcohol and substance use disorders</td>
<td>Corticosteroids</td>
<td>Seasonal changes</td>
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<td>Stress at work</td>
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<td>Financial problems</td>
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Life events
Depression can also affect our behavioural patterns. This involves not doing as much as you used to do, and spending a lot of time indoors, or alone. This leads to a loss of motivation, which can affect the way we feel.

Vicious cycle of depression:

1. **Spend most of our time alone, and stop doing things we previously enjoyed, e.g. socializing with friends, or certain activities.**

2. **This can lead to boredom or feeling that life is meaningless.**

3. **Being inactive, e.g. lying in bed or watching TV can lead us to feel even more lethargic.**

4. **This can lead to feeling like we've wasted our day or achieved very little.**

5. **By spending lots of time alone, we have lots of time to worry about our problems.**
The way in which we interpret or think about things can lead us to feel depressed. How we think affects the way we feel. When feeling depressed, we think more negatively about ourselves, the world and our future:

**Thoughts**

The way in which we interpret or think about things can lead us to feel depressed. How we think affects the way we feel. When feeling depressed, we think more negatively about ourselves, the world and our future:

**Ourselves**
- e.g. ‘I’m boring,’ ‘I’m ugly,’ ‘I’m a failure’

**Others**
- e.g. ‘No-one likes me,’ ‘Everyone is better than me’

**The future:**
- e.g. ‘Things will never get better,’ ‘What’s the point?’

This subsequently can **negatively impact our mood**. It is believed that this is a key element in **maintaining a depressive state**.

This thinking style can become a habit that is hard to break out of, and eventually these thoughts come to mind automatically.

There are different types of thinking styles; some can be unhelpful and unrealistic, and therefore have a negative effect on the way we feel.

The first step in tackling unhelpful thoughts is to **identify** them. Once you are able to identify such thoughts, you can begin to **examine and critically analyse** them and look for more helpful alternatives.
## Do you recognise any of these in your own thinking?

### Unhelpful Thinking styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Black and white thinking</strong></th>
<th><strong>Should and must statements</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Believing that something or someone is good or bad, right or wrong. If something isn’t perfect, then it is considered a failure.</td>
<td>• Thinking about how things should be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Judging situations as if the world should be perfect</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Catastrophising</strong></th>
<th><strong>Over-generalisation</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen.</td>
<td>• Perceiving a negative event or situation as meaning that everything will always be negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Exaggerating the importance of events, and how awful they will be.</td>
<td>• If you are having a bad experience at a party, you overgeneralise that every party you will go to will be bad.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Critical self</strong></th>
<th><strong>Ignoring the positives</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not (totally) our fault or that were difficult to predict.</td>
<td>• Ignoring the positive aspects of life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Negative focus</strong></th>
<th><strong>Labelling</strong></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• When you focus on negative details, you dwell on your weaknesses and forget about your strengths.</td>
<td>• When feeling low you often label yourself in a negative way.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Mind-reading</strong></th>
<th><strong>Memories</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Assuming that you know what others are thinking (about you).</td>
<td>• Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assuming the worst will happen – you start trying to predict the future.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Taking things personally</strong></th>
<th><strong>Predicting the future</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• When we are feeling low, we often take things to heart.</td>
<td>• When you spend time predicting what will go wrong in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Behaving as if you have a crystal ball and know what comes next.</td>
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</table>
What keeps depression going?

Our behaviour, thoughts, feelings and physical sensations all interact and keeps our depression going. We call this the ‘hot cross bun’. An example is given below of how the element of the hot cross bun interacts to maintain and worsen depressive symptoms.

**Behaviours**
- Turn down social contact
- Stay in bed

**Physical Sensations**
- Achy
- Exhausted
- Irritable

**Thoughts**
- ‘I’ve wasted my day’
- ‘Things will never change’
- ‘I’m a failure’

**Emotions**
- Sad
- Tearful
- Bored
Everyone is different, and will have an individual experience of depression. Before this can be tackled, it is important to understand your own experience of depression.

**Your experience**

*Have a go at filling in your own diagram which will help you understand your own difficulties and how some factors may relate together.*
How to manage your depression?

Understanding depression provides the basis for planning appropriate strategies to tackle it. You can use this framework to assess how and why depression is affecting you:

**Things to keep in mind:**

- **Consider what strategies are going to be most effective for you.**
- **Think about what strategies will work for you in the…**
  - **Short term**
  - **Long term**

Now that you have an understanding of depression, you can begin to tackle how to cope with it.

This can include:

1. **How we respond to thoughts: Changing our relationship to unhelpful thoughts**
2. **Taking care of yourself**
3. **Improve your problem solving skills**
4. **Learning ways to notice your qualities and achievements**

Bear in mind that below are some strategies that can be effective in both short-term and long-term management of depression. As everyone is unique, it’s worthwhile trying all the strategies below, as you may find that some work better than others.
One approach to overcoming unhelpful thoughts is to **recognise** them and identify them when they appear.

You can use the thinking styles table above to help you identify these thoughts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Automatic unhelpful thought</th>
<th>Thinking styles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write down your thoughts</td>
<td>Identify the thinking styles you have fallen into.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**

My friend hasn’t called me when they said they would, I think they don’t like me anymore.

- Taking things personally
- Catastrophising
We can learn techniques to manage these unhelpful thoughts, which can subsequently help to improve our mood. You can ask yourself the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing your unhelpful thought?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your unhelpful thought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My friend hasn’t called when they said they would. I don’t think they like me anymore</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does it make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sad, empty, tearful</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify any unhelpful thinking styles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’m jumping to conclusions</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the facts of the situation? Is there a plausible reason to back up this thought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They failed to call me but there may have been another reason as to why they couldn’t phone.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking in this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs: <em>It’s really upset me, and I’m feeling really down and alone. Because of this, I can’t concentrate on anything else.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits: <em>I can’t think of any</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any evidence to support this that would stand up in a court of law?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We’ve been good friends for years, they’ve just started a new job so they were most likely busy or they just forgot.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a proactive solution to this unhelpful thought?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I could give them a call</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there another way to look at the situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>They are probably busy and will call when they have time</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What advice would I give someone else in this situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>There’s probably a good reason to why they haven’t called, as there is no reason to suggest that they are fed up with me, or that they have any reason to not like me.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Think about your own unhelpful thoughts.** Use the structure below to pick apart your own thought process. At first, it will be a hard process. However, if you use this structure frequently, you will be able to manage these thoughts more easily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your unhelpful thought?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does it make you feel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify any unhelpful thinking styles:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I mind-reading? Am I catastrophising? Am I being unrealistic?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any evidence to support this that would stand up in a court of law?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking in this way?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there any evidence to contradict what you are thinking?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a proactive solution to this unhelpful thought?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there another way to look at the situation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What advice would I give someone else in this situation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Looking after yourself

This section will focus on aspects relating to you! This includes:

- Sleep routine
- Being active
- Making good use of your time
- Eating well
- Managing your stress
- Mindfulness
- Improving your problem solving skills
- Learning ways to notice your qualities and achievements
Sleep is an essential **biological function** which is necessary for **physiological rest and emotional wellbeing**. The body is seen to function best when there is a consistent pattern of sleep and waking, rather than solely on the hours of sleep gained in a night. Depression can heavily impact sleep. A good sleep routine can really help you improve the way you think, feel and behave.

### The science behind it

Depression disrupts sleep – why?

Unhelpful thoughts and depressed thinking during the day build up to high levels of emotional arousal. It is argued that during periods of Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep, the brain tries to process and release this high level of activity and stress, and therefore tires instead of being refreshed. In particular, it has been shown that depression is associated with altered sleep, such as a disturbed REM sleep regulation (Palagini et al., 2013). This is seen to affect the general quality and amount of sleep, as well as dream patterns. When sleep is disrupted, it can make us more sensitive to emotional and stressful events that occur in everyday life (Vandekerckhove and Cluydts, 2010).

### Ways to improve your daily sleeping routine:

- Reduce stimulation, such as noise and lights
- Keep the room slightly cool, as people tend to sleep better in cooler environments
- Avoid work or other stimulating activities before going to sleep
- Avoid consuming stimulating substances such as caffeine, alcohol and nicotine in the evening before going to bed
- Avoid naps as daytime sleep can disrupt your nightly sleep cycle
- Regular exercise during the day, but not before bed
- Getting up at the same time each day can help maintain a regular sleep pattern
- Having a ‘wind down’ routine before going to bed can make it easier to sleep, including relaxation exercises.
- If it is hard to get to sleep, then move to another room and do a relaxing and soothing activity before returning to bed
- A warm bath can help to improve sleep quality
Exercise has shown to be **as effective as medication** in treating mild to moderate depression. People who are feeling depressed may often feel like they have no in control of their life. Exercise raises the level of endorphins in your brain. This can contribute increasing your overall mood, by giving you a sense of achievement, and control over your body. This may be one of the first steps in gaining control over other parts of your life.

Exercise is seen to **improve your self-esteem**, however it has also been proven to:

- Reduce stress
- Ward off anxiety and feelings of depression
- Improve sleep
- Strengthen your heart
- Increase energy levels
- Lower blood pressure
- Improve muscle tone and strength

Any form of exercise can help depression. In particular, aerobic moderate exercise is seen to be most beneficial. Examples include:

- Biking
- Running
- Dancing
- Yoga
- Low-impact aerobics
- Swimming
- Walking
- Tennis
- Housework (especially activities such as Hoovering, mopping, sweeping)

**Things to keep in mind:**

What physical activities do you enjoy?

Do you prefer individual or group activities?

What will suit my lifestyle?
It is important to explore all forms of exercise out there, and find something that you enjoy. By incorporating exercise into the things you do for fun, you are more likely to carry it out and make it a lifelong habit.

It is recommended that you should try to exercise at least 20-30 minutes, 3 times a week.

Whilst it might be a struggle to first do, you will find that doing even just a small amount of exercise actually begins to make you less tired.

**Tips for exercising:**

Choose an activity you enjoy

Make an exercise routine and add it to your diary

Stick with it! It will soon become a habit, and part of your life.

If you start to become bored, mix it up and try a variety of exercise

Find someone to do exercise with. It will help you to keep motivated
Feeling depressed can lead to a loss of motivation. This may include giving up hobbies or interests you once enjoyed.

One way to boost your mood, is to start doing things that you enjoy again. This may be a past hobby, or this may be something new. Try and make some time to carry these activities.

Everyone has different interests; however, below are a few suggestions:

- See a friend
  - Socialising is an effective way of lifting our mood, even if you don’t feel like it at times.
- Go to the cinema
- Do something active (e.g. housework, walking the dog)
- Take part in a hobby or a sport
- Treat yourself (buying something nice)
- Watch a movie or TV show
- Visit a relative
- Go shopping
- Try out a new recipe
- Go for a walk, or go to the park
- Take advantage of any free events (e.g. visiting a museum, art gallery)
- Read a book

Some people find creative activities help them express their feelings. Some examples are:

- Drawing
- Taking photographs
- Writing
- Playing music
- Gardening
Using a diary can help you plan your time effectively. It might help if you fill in all the activities you have to do (e.g. preparing meals, housework, appointments) so you can see what time you have free. You can then plan what you would like to do.

**Things to keep in mind:**

- Give yourself time to relax
- An **activity diary** is a good way to plan your time; however, it is unlikely that things will always go to plan, so it is fine to be flexible and to allow for events that may be unexpected.
- Start writing just a few activities, trying to do the easiest stuff first
- You can work through this list and tick off the things you achieve
- At the end of each day, you will be able to see what you have done.
- Try and build up to setting yourself more activities.
A common symptom of depression is a sudden change in appetite or weight. It is important to be aware of your food intake as depression can affect your eating patterns. Low motivation associated with depression can mean that food may not be prepared as well and you may have less appetite for it. This can lead to poor food choices and irregular eating patterns, both of which can intensify depression.

Some foods in particular can have an effect on your mood; this is because they affect chemicals in the brain which, in turn, affects the state of your mood. Irregular eating patterns affect blood sugar levels, which also have an impact on mood.

These irregular eating patterns and bad food choices can create a vicious food and mood cycle. However, by choosing the right foods and eating at regular times, you can prevent yourself from falling into this cycle.

**Eating to maintain better emotional health:**

**Eat regular meals**

(Breakfast, mid-morning snack, lunch, afternoon snack, dinner, evening snack)

- It is recommended that you start the day with breakfast (examples: wholegrain cereal such porridge with fruit, multigrain toast with a poached egg or fruit and yoghurt)
- Eating regularly stabilises blood sugar levels, which in turn, stabilise mood.
- Regular meals prevent cravings
- Healthy meals and snacks boost metabolism
- Healthy eating ensures that energy is used effectively

**Snacks for between meals can include:**

Handful of nuts and raisins, flaxseed, hemp, pumpkin seeds, soybean, safflower, corn, sunflower seeds, fruit, vegetables, yoghurt, crackers with a low fat cheese or fish.
Get the right balance
(Carbohydrates, fats, glucose, proteins)

- It is recommended that you **try and use fresh foods** and ingredients where possible when making a meal.

- **Carbohydrates**
  - Carbohydrates are broken down into blood glucose. Eating a steady supply of carbohydrates every day is essential as one of the most important organs, the **brain**, can **only use glucose** (not fat or proteins) as fuel.

- **Fats**
  - Fats are needed to maintain health. **Increasing unsaturated fats** and decreasing saturated fats are necessary for good brain structure, function and heart health.
  - Unsaturated fats can be increased by adding olive oil and rapeseed oil to meals or adding nuts and seeds.
  - Trans fats should be avoided when possible. They are particularly evident in burgers, sausages, processed meats, ready meals, cake and biscuits.

- **Proteins**
  - **Tryptophan is the amino acid mainly responsible for the production of serotonin** and has been shown to be **associated with depression**. It is argued that a lack of serotonin is associated with depression.
  - As having tryptophan in your diet has been shown to improve mood, it is important to make sure there is enough protein within your diet. It is recommended that one-third of your plate should be protein.
  - Examples: Fresh meat, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk, low fat cheese, nuts, lentils and beans are the best sources of protein.
• **Omega 3 oils**
  - Research has demonstrated individuals regularly taking cod liver-oil (which is high in omega 3 fatty acids) were 30% less likely to have symptoms of depressive compared to a control group (Raeder et al., 2006).
  - It is recommended to eat two-four portions of oily fish per week. Examples include: salmon, mackerel, herring, sardines, pilchards, trout.
  - It is also possible to take omega 3 fortified foods such as eggs and milk.
  - An alternative is to take omega 3- supplement, which is high in eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexanoic acid (DHA). It is recommended to take up to 1g/day.

• **Nutritional supplements**
  - If you feel you are unable to effectively gain all the nutrients from your current diet, an alternative is to take multivitamins.
  - You may want to take a one-a-day complete multivitamin and mineral supplement (in particular, ones that have 100% of recommended daily intakes)

• **Water**
  - Research has shown that drinking lots of fluids are extremely important, not just physically, but also for your mood.
  - It is recommended to drink 6-8 glasses (about 1.5-2 litres) per day.
  - Drinks with caffeine can have a detrimental effect on your mood, and can lead to withdrawal headaches and low/irritable mood.
  - Examples include: energy drinks, coffee, cola, green tea, tea and chocolate all contain caffeine.
  - Try to limit these drinks to 3 cups of coffee, or 5 cups of tea a day.

*The information above is based on the British Dietetic Association recommended guidelines.*

**Other things to keep in mind:**

**Avoid over-restrictive eating habits,** such as crash dieting, being obsessed with dieting and comfort eating. All these eating habits may create its own downward spiral, and lead you to feel low and more depressed. By creating a realistic, wholesome approach to eating, this may not only benefit physically, but also affect your mood.

**Be aware of medication side-effects,** which may affect your appetite and food choices. If you believe this concerns you, talk to your appropriate clinician about this.
Managing your stress

Stress is a major factor which can intensify any depressive feelings. **Stress can affect the way we think, feel and behave.** Recognising when you are feeling stressed and the symptoms of stress can help you adopt healthy coping mechanisms. Whilst it is sometimes hard to prevent stress, there are many things that can help you effectively cope with stress.

Strategies that are helpful in managing stress include:

- Calm breathing exercise
- Muscular relaxation

## Calm breathing

Calm breathing is a technique that helps you to **slow down your breathing** when feeling stressed and anxious.

Calm breathing includes taking smooth, slow and regular breaths:

- Get into a comfortable position
- Recognise the movement of your chest, keeping movement regular and steady. It can be helpful to count to three as you do this.
- Breathe gently and slowly, low in your chest, just above your waist.
- Breathe through your nose and take a little longer to breathe out than to breathe in. Perhaps try to breathe in for 3 seconds, and hold your breath for 2 seconds. It can be helpful to count as you do this:

  e.g.  
  
  **IN**, 2, 3, **HOLD**, 2, 3, **OUT**, 2, 3 **HOLD**, 2, 3

- At the end of each breath, allow time to pause before you take your next breath in.
- Make sure your arms and neck are relaxed as you work on your breathing.
- Complete this exercise for a few minutes. You should soon begin to feel more relaxed.
- As you practice, your arms and legs should become more relaxed which will make your breathing easier.
Muscle relaxation

Tension is a common symptom of feeling stressed. Muscular relaxation helps you to control the physical tension, and help you relax in general.

During this exercise, you have to tense and then relax different muscles in your body. You want to work systematically through the body starting with the hands, working up to the shoulders, moving to the face, then the back, the stomach and then finally the legs.

Applying relaxed breathing techniques can help you to gain the maximum benefit from muscle relaxation.

- Get in a comfortable position. Actively focus on yourself and on achieving relaxation in specific body muscles. Tune out all other thoughts.
- Tense and relax each muscle group for 5 seconds, as follows:

**Face**

Wrinkle your forehead and try to make your eyebrows touch your hairline. Close your eyes as tightly as you can. Draw the centres of your mouth back and grimace

5 seconds, relax.

Feel the warmth and calmness in your face.

**Hands**

Extend your arms in front of you. Clench your fists tightly

5 seconds, relax. Feel the warmth and calmness in your hands.

**Forearms**

Extend your arms out against an invisible wall and push forward with your hands

5 seconds - Relax. Feel the tension leave your arms

**Shoulders**

Shrug your shoulders up to your ears

5 seconds - Relax.

**Stomach**

Tighten your stomach muscles

5 seconds - Relax.
**Hips and buttocks**

Tighten your hip and buttock muscles

*5 seconds - Relax.*

**Thighs**

Tighten your thigh muscles by pressing your legs together as tightly as you can

*5 seconds - Relax.*

**Feet**

Bend your ankles toward your body as far as you can

*5 seconds - Relax.*

**Toes**

Curl your toes as tightly as you can

*5 seconds – Relax*

- Focus on any muscles which may still be tense
- If any muscle remains tense, tighten and relax the specific muscle three or four times.
- Fix the feeling of relaxation in your mind. Resolve to repeat the process again.
Mindfulness means ‘awareness’. It is a form of meditation that involves paying attention to the present moment – to your own thoughts and feelings, and to the world around you without judgment.

Becoming more aware of the present moment means noticing the sights, smells, sounds and tastes that you experience, as well as the thoughts and feelings that occur from one moment to the next.

Good mental well-being means feeling good about your life and yourself, and being able to get on with life in the way you want. What we do, and the way we think have the biggest impact on well-being.

What can mindfulness help you with?

Evidence suggests that mindfulness has a positive effect on general wellbeing. Sitting non-judgmentally with your thoughts and feelings:

* Reduces anxiety
* Reduces depression
* Enhances mood
* Enhances quality of life
* Reduces pain
* Enhances function
* Enhances immune system
* Enhances sense of wholeness

Professor Williams, professor of Clinical Psychology at Oxford Mindfulness Centre,

“It’s easy to stop noticing the world around us. It’s also easy to lose touch with the way our bodies are feeling and to end up living “in our heads” – caught up in our thoughts without stopping to notice how those thoughts are driving our emotions and behaviour”

Mindfulness allows us to become more aware of the stream of thoughts and feelings we experience. It can help us see how we can become entangled in a stream of thoughts which are unhelpful to us. This helps us to stand back from our thoughts, and start to see emerging patterns. Gradually, we can train ourselves to notice when our thoughts are taking over, and realise that thoughts are simply ‘mental events’ that do not control us.

Most of us have issues that we find hard to let go, and mindfulness can help us deal with them more productively. From this, we can ask “Is trying to solve this by brooding over it helpful, or am I just getting caught up in my thoughts”

Mindfulness can be applied to all aspects of your life. This includes mindful thinking, mindful movement, mindful breathing and mindful senses.
**How can I be mindful?**

You can practice mindfulness through a variety of exercises.

It is helpful to read the instructions before and gradually learn them off by heart. Alternatively ask someone to read out the instructions for you, or record your voice.

**How can I breathe mindfully?**

- Find a quiet space where you won’t be disturbed.
- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed or lowered and your back straight.
- Bring attention to your breathing. Not changing the breath in any way, just experiencing it, allowing it to be as you find it.
- Notice the natural, gentle rhythm of your breathing as you breathe in and out, and focus only on this. Simply be aware of the breath, and the feelings associated with breathing.
- Allowing the breath to remind you, over and over again, to be fully present.
- Right here, right now.
- Just this breath, just this moment.
- Thoughts will come into your mind, and that’s okay, because that’s what the mind does. Just notice these thoughts then bring your attention back to your breathing.
- You may notice sounds, physical feelings and emotions, but again let them drift on by; bringing your attention back to your breathing.
- Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in your thoughts or feelings, simply note that this has happened, and then gently bring your attention back to your breathing.
- Thoughts will enter your awareness, and your attention will follow them.
- No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing. If you are very distracted, it might help to say ‘in’ and ‘out’ as you breathe.

The more you practise this exercise, the more it will help you manage your anxiety. At least 5-10 minutes a day is recommended.
How can I think mindfully?

- Focus on the present moment.

- When you feel like your mind is bombarding you with thoughts or worries. Remember: Our minds wander because that is what minds do.

- When focusing consciously on one aspect like our breath, our brain wanders and seeks new stimuli.

- Now, focus on the thinking process itself.

- Let your breathing and sense of your body and sounds be in the background, and allow the thinking process itself to become the centre of your attention for the moment.

- Rather than following individual thoughts to lead you off on a train of thoughts.

- See if it’s possible to just sit and watch, sit and notice what thoughts bubble up into consciousness.

- Not getting involved in the content and going from one thought to the next but just seeing and labelling each thought as it comes up in the mind as a thought, as an event. Just as a sound would be an observable event and letting the thoughts come and go.

- Imagine you are sitting by a gently flowing stream where there are leaves floating on the stream. Take every thought that pops into your head whether it’s a picture or a word and place it on top of a leaf and watch it float by down the stream.

- Letting go of each thought that arises, just sitting with this awareness of thoughts, coming and going, observing them.

- If you find yourself at any point drawn into the train of thoughts, just come back to the observation of thoughts as events, using your breathing and a sense of your body to anchor you and stabilise you in the present moment.
Everyone encounters problems. However, having lots of problems that become overwhelming can also directly affect our mood. In particular, unresolved problems can lead to excessively worrying and rumination. This can subsequently make us feel worse in mood, and can also affect our sleep. By learning to cope and effectively manage these problems, this can help us feel more in control, and directly raise our mood. It can be useful to adopt a structured approach to facing problems in everyday life.

Here is a guide to help you improve your problem solving skills:

❖ Identify
  o Ask yourself ‘what is the problem?’
  o Be as specific as you can

❖ Solutions
  o Make a list of all the ways in which this problem can be solved
  o Write down anything that comes to mind
  o Consider:
    ▪ How you have solved similar problems in the past
    ▪ How would you ideally want to solve the problem
    ▪ What would your friends or family recommend
    ▪ How do you see yourself tackling the problem

❖ Choose
  o Now go through the list you have made and carefully assess each solution and choose the best solution you think is suitable for this problem
  o It may be useful to think about the pros and cons of each solution and this can help you to select the best option.
  o If you are undecided on which solution seems most appropriate, consider a number of ideas instead of one. This can be done by choosing one idea
to start off with, and if it doesn’t work, you can always go back to your list and choose a different solution.

❖ Break it down

- When carrying out your solution, it may be helpful to break it down into smaller manageable steps. This can make it easier to follow through with the solution, and build up your confidence.
- Depending on your problem, the number of steps may vary in context and in complexity.
- **Example:**

  **Problem:** Jane has written her activity diary for the next week to help her manage her time more efficiently. However, she is struggling to begin one of the activities she has set for herself this week. She has written that she will start a new hobby, and join an aerobics class at the local leisure centre. However, the idea of leaving the house is too daunting, especially meeting new people in a new environment. She’s thinking of scrapping this idea altogether.

  **Steps:**
  1. Looking up the leisure centre and the class, and researching exactly what happens during the yoga class
  2. Finding the directions to get there
  3. Preparing what you will need for the class
  4. Giving yourself enough time to get ready, and to get to the leisure centre with plenty of time
  5. Getting there early to speak to the instructor or another person before the class starts
  6. Record your experience of the yoga class- how it made you feel, and any details that happened at the class. Focus on the positive experiences, and feel some sense of accomplishment for taking the steps to carrying out the activity.

❖ Trying and Reviewing

- Follow the steps you have chosen to carry out your solution
- Take them in manageable steps one by one
o Don’t feel the need to rush and complete all the steps. Go at a pace that is suitable to you.

o After completing the steps, review the outcome of your solution, and the way in which you dealt with the problem.

o If you find that your solution has been successful, take this as a great achievement! But if the problem still remains, you should not be discouraged by this. There may be other options to consider such as:

**Ask yourself:**

- Is there a different solution that you could try?
- Are there any solutions you haven’t thought about
- Ask a friend or family member what they would do when faced with the same problem

Bear in mind that not all problems are within our control, and in some cases such problems can be difficult to resolve using the steps outlined in this section. It may be the case that you have to wait or ask someone else to take some action instead. In such situations, it is vital to not worry excessively about these problems as they are out of our control and worrying will only make us feel worse.
When feeling depressed, we often focus on the negative things that have occurred to us or the negative things people have said to us. Focusing on such thoughts can make us feel low in mood, and can lower our self-esteem. It is vital to remember the skills and qualities you have and also the achievements you have made.

Noticing the positive aspects of yourself, and behaving like someone who deserves happiness and fun, is a good way to raise your self-esteem and your mood!

- Often as humans, we instinctively focus on the negative things rather than the positives. Whilst it’s easy to rarely pay attention to the positives, it is important to reflect on the positive things about yourself and the things you’ve done, however big or small. This may include positive qualities, positive outcomes or positive comments from others.

- Write down as many positive things about yourself as you can think of.

- Here are examples to start you off. Think of evidence that shows:
  - What do you do well in
  - What achievements you have made
  - Topics you know a lot about
  - Comments from others about you or your qualities
  - Moments when you have been appreciated (for your actions/qualities)
  - Moments when you have helped others
  - Things you are skilled at
  - How would someone who cared about you would describe you
  - Remember to include everything, no matter how small or insignificant you think it might be
Re-read! It is important to go over the positives that you have listed, and reflect on what you’ve written whenever you are feeling low.

From these, try to think of examples from every-day life that correspond to your good qualities.

Example: Jane’s list

- Considerate
- Avid reader
- Good listener
- Animal lover
- Good friend
- Movie buff
- Outdoors person
- Good cook

Example: Jane’s list

- Considerate

  I went round to my elderly neighbour’s house and checked she was okay.

  My brother is going through a divorce, so I invited him round and cooked him dinner.
Using the guidance above; firstly write down your qualities, achievements and positive feedback from others. Lastly, think of supporting evidence to demonstrate these positives.
We would like to acknowledge Dr Michelle Sowden and Dr Elizabeth Chorlton and Dr Michelle Conn, at the Department of Psychological Medicine at Frimley Park Hospital for helping us to develop and review this resource.


NHS website information on Depression:

http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/depression/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Eating:

The British Dietetic Association (BDA).

www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

Sleep articles:


We hope you have found the information in this booklet useful. You can continue to use the techniques you found helpful. Some of the techniques may take some time to be effective, so it is perhaps worth trying them out for a few weeks.

However, if you feel your situation feels largely unchanged or if you didn’t find this booklet useful, you should raise this issue to the clinical psychologist at your appointment, or speak to your GP who can tell you more about other options which you may find helpful.