DEPRESSION

don’t let it get you down
WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a very common experience - over two million people report symptoms every year. In its mildest form depression makes everything seem harder to do and less worthwhile. At its worst, it can be life-threatening - you may simply feel like giving up.

But people do come through it, and this leaflet suggests many ways to help you beat depression.

Everybody's experience of depression is different. For some life is a struggle. They feel bad about themselves, sometimes sinking into complete despair. Other people lose interest in life, their hobbies or the future.

"Sometimes nothing can cheer me, I lose all self-confidence - I can barely write my name."

When experiencing depression you may feel as if nothing can help you and begin to avoid things which might make you feel better. Life can seem overwhelming and the simplest tasks become impossible. You may feel worthless or be tempted to seek refuge in alcohol, drugs, tobacco or food.

WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

There is no single cause for depression - sometimes it strikes like a bolt from the blue. It may be a mixture of causes - social factors, physical problems or traumatic events which may have happened to you in childhood affecting the way you feel now, or how you deal with adult relationships. You may have suffered bereavement or deep upheaval in your life - divorce, redundancy, unemployment. Retirement can also be deeply unsettling.

The way you react to these life events may affect your mental health and well-being.
Physical problems such as disablement or ageing can also lead to depression. Chemical alterations in your body such as hormonal changes or imbalance may have a similar effect. Some physical problems can also be caused by depression. It can stop you sleeping or make you lose your appetite.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOURSELF?

There are two important points about depression - knowing what they are will help you defeat it:

- It feeds on itself
- It takes up a lot of time

So try the following to make sure that depression doesn’t take over your life:

- Do one thing you enjoy each day to make you feel good about yourself
- Ask for help – there are people out there who will listen and support you
- Keep active and interested – a short walk or reading a book may help put you on the road to recovery
- Look after your health
- Express your feelings - if you feel sad – cry, if you feel angry – shout, if you need to talk – TALK

Once you begin you’ll find you can do a lot to help yourself. But if you’re on your own, or if support from family and friends isn’t working, there are other people who can help.
GETTING HELP

Help can come from the health service or outside. Different things help different people. You don't need to restrict yourself to one course of action - find out more, try things out and trust your instincts.

Do what works best for you.

Many people with depression are treated by their doctor with anti-depressants. Your pharmacist can advise you about the medication prescribed. Taking pills helps reduce the feelings of depression but will not solve the underlying problems. Talking your worries through with someone supportive will help this. For this reason your doctor may also refer you to a psychiatrist, counsellor or psychotherapist. You could also try ringing the telephone helplines listed at the end of this leaflet.

Pills are for symptoms, talking is for problems.

Non-medical approaches can be helpful too, like aromatherapy, massage, yoga and gentle exercise in a group - all accessible in most areas. These will be listed in your phone directory.

If your depression has a specific cause - unemployment, money worries, family stress - get specialist advice to help sort the problems. Citizen's Advice Bureaux are useful places to start for legal or financial problems.

Self-help

There are self-help groups in most parts of the country, often linked to local voluntary organisations. Meeting other people with experience of depression can reduce feelings of isolation. It can also be helpful to hear how other people cope.

Day Centres

Run by Social Services or voluntary organisations, day or drop-in centres offer a range of activities and help with practical problems. They are places where you can make new friends, express yourself and receive support.

Sometimes finding that you can help others, helps you.
ANTI-DEPRESSANTS

Anti-depressants can be useful if you are 'stuck' in a depression or do not feel able to try other ways of beating your depression. They may help you reach a point where you can make use of other kinds of support.

"I find anti-depressants helpful. They give me a kickstart and help me get enough energy to start tackling my problems."

Do anti-depressants have any side effects?

The unwanted effects of anti-depressants vary according to the type of medicine and the individual response of the person taking them. Effects range from drowsiness and rapid heartbeat to jitteriness and nausea. Your pharmacist will be able to tell you more about the effects of your medication and what side-effects are most common.

Anti-depressants normally take between 2-4 weeks to have their effect so don’t stop taking them because you think they aren’t working. Your doctor will prescribe the most suitable anti-depressant for you, taking any other medication you have into account.

Ask your pharmacist or doctor for advice if you are worried about the unwanted effects of taking anti-depressants.

How long will I need to take them?

This will vary for each individual, but research indicates that you should take them for six months or more after you begin to feel better. Otherwise the depression is more likely to come back. All medication should be taken regularly. Seek medical advice if you are thinking of stopping as some people get withdrawal symptoms for up to a month afterwards.

When in doubt ask your pharmacist or doctor for advice.

COUNSELLING, COGNITIVE OR PSYCHOTHERAPY

These therapies can help you find the tools to tackle set patterns of thought or behaviour which may be triggering your depression.

Counselling is usually given short-term to help with current problems.