

# Dealing with low mood and depression

## Low mood and life's ups and downs

It's natural to feel sad, low or despondent in response to setbacks, upsetting life events and difficulties.

Someone with a congenital heart condition might, at times, face additional challenges that can affect their mood, such as: changes in symptoms experienced, feeling different from others, deterioration in health, possible physical limits on exercise and activities, waiting for and recovery from surgery, bereavement and concerns about the future and life expectancy issues.

*"...many of us have had dark spells. The combination of feeling different, and other things going on in our lives and how our GUCH-ness affects those things can be a big burden at times ...".*

Getting down and feeling low can be a normal reaction to these events, as can the experience of other feelings like anxiety and anger. At these times it is important to focus on taking care of yourself and getting support (see the recovery and self-help section).

*"I think it's a club that we all join from time to time. Don't be too hard on yourself, absorb yourself in something you enjoy - a book, a cd, a call to a friend. Every little helps."*  
Keano

## Depression

Depression is when feelings of low mood continue for a longer period of time and become more intense, so that they start to interfere with daily life. This can lead to despair, feeling hopeless, sleep problems, negative or morbid thoughts, agitation or lack of energy. People often withdraw and cut themselves off from other people when feeling depressed.

Living with a long term condition can mean that people are more susceptible to depression. Research has also shown that depression can occur post operatively and after stays in ICU.

Unfortunately, because of the stigma that surrounds emotional and mental health issues, some people find it hard to speak about their concerns and to reach out for help. I would like to encourage you to talk to someone - please don't suffer in silence. Contact your GP as there are sources of support and treatments for depression.

There are also many self help organisations and the Samaritans are on the other end of the telephone 24 hours a day if you feel despairing or have suicidal thoughts.

Depression is a common experience and can affect 1 in 5 people at some time in their life.

*“Talking to someone had really helped me understand myself for once and accept that I needed to put myself first.” Gilly*

## Treatment and recovery

Talk to your GP about how you are feeling and possible treatments for depression such as talking therapies and anti depressant medication. If your depression is severe the GP can also refer you to the local community mental health team for assessment.

**Anti-depressant medication** can be an effective treatment for some people. Check out with your cardiologist/doctor the possible interactions with any other medications you might be taking. It can take up to 4 weeks before anti-depressants start to work and it is important to taper them very gradually in consultation with the GP when stopping.

**Talking treatments** such as counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy can also be very effective. Your GP might be able to refer you to a service or there might be other community options locally. Some of the ACHD Clinics have a psychology service you could ask to be referred too.

For more information on accessing talking therapies please see: [How to Access Counselling and Psychological Services](#)

*“The counselling has helped me to let go of the guilt I feel and the constant blame I place on myself for everything going wrong. Without counselling I’d still be tormenting myself”. Gilly*

**Taking care and self-help** are really important in dealing with low mood and depression. It is important treat yourself with kindness and compassion. See the section on recovery and self-help for some suggestions and check out the other organisations that can be of help.

**Exercise** can have a very positive psychological effect, helping to lift mood. Read more about the [psychological and social benefits of exercise](#).

Check out [MIND’s online information about depression](#), forms of treatment, medication and self-help.

## Recovery and Self-help



### Talk to someone - get support

- phone a friend or family member
- phone a helpline , join a self-help group
- talk to your GP or other healthcare professional



### Keep active

- occupy your mind and distract yourself through activities
- gardening, DIY, computer games, film/TV, books, going for a walk
- try and do something you enjoy everyday



### Get creative

- express your thoughts and feelings
- paint, draw, write, dance, play music



### Take care of yourself

- eat well
- take exercise
- take time to de-stress and relax



### Challenge negative attitudes

- try not to be too hard on yourself
- notice negative thinking and try and counteract it or occupy your mind with something else
- treat yourself with kindness and compassion



### Get involved

- keep up with friends
  - get involved in community activities
  - help someone else out
-

## Helpful organisations

[MIND](#) has a website full of information on all sorts of mental health topics including depression, anti-depressant medication, talking therapies.

*They also have an info-line: 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm).*

[Campaign Against Living Miserably \(CALM\)](#) has information, online chat and a helpline targeted at men to tackle depression and suicide.

*Helpline: 0800 58 58 58 5pm to midnight 365 days a year.*

[Students against Depression](#) has lots of self-help tools for depression.

[Depression UK](#) promotes mutual support between people who are affected by depression.

[The Samaritans](#) offer a listening ear to anyone who is distressed, despairing or feeling suicidal. Their helpline is available day and night and is free: **Call: 116 123**

[Breathing Space Scotland](#) for people who are down and depressed.

*Helpline 0800 83 85 87 Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am + Fri 6pm-Mon 6am*

[Aware - Northern Ireland](#) provides advice and information for people experiencing depression. They have a network of self-help groups across Northern Ireland

[PAPYRUS](#) aims to support young people who are feeling down and suicidal. Offers support and information to unders 35's and parents, friends, professional who are worried about them.

*Helpline: 0800 068 41 41 Mon-Fri 10am to 10pm and Sat/Sun 2-10pm*

### BOOKS



#### ***Overcoming***

***Depression*** by Paul Gilbert: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques.

***Climbing out of Depression*** by Sue Atkinson

***Caring for Someone with Depression*** by Toni Battison

*Information written and collated by Anne Crump, Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, The Somerville Foundation, (updated December 2018).*