

June 2011

Recognising and Overcoming Depression

There are few disorders which can silently destroy the beauty of our being and gifts of our creation more than the multi faceted and diverse symptoms of depression.

Depression is, without doubt, the fastest growing illness in the U.K

Approximately 1 person in every 5 will become depressed at some point in their lives and one in 20 will be clinically depressed. Statistics suggest that women are more vulnerable to depression, but men generally find it harder to admit to or talk about their experiences. We should never try to dismiss the symptoms of depression and always take them seriously, they are never an inevitable part of growing up or growing old. It is possible to overcome depression, and to prevent its return.

If we are suffering from depression it means that our brain and nervous system has reached a point where it has slowed down. In most cases it will do this because it is confronted with too much stress. Stress or imagined stress is very often the trigger for a panic attack. This stress may be related to current issues but far more likely an event has triggered a past experience which we have pushed down deeply within ourselves and which is not in our conscious self.

Many people suffering from mental problems will be prone to panic or anxiety attacks as depression is very often intertwined with these. It is often suggested that if we suffer from one of these problems we are likely to suffer from the other. In many cases depression has its roots in our shame, our sorrow and our hope.

When we are attacked by depression it seems impossible to function and to enjoy life as we should. Hobbies and friends don't interest us as they used to, we feel exhausted all the time and just getting through the day can be massively overwhelming. Although, when we are depressed, things may feel hopeless, with help and support we can get better. Firstly we need the right tools and learning about depression, recognising the signs, symptoms and causes, is the first step to beating this enemy.

I often hear the word "depression" being used to explain feelings of sadness, but sadness is a healthy reaction to events in our life. Depression is much more than just sadness. Depression can be described as like 'living in a black hole' and carrying a sense of impending doom. But often depressed people don't experience sadness at all and instead can simply feel lifeless, empty, and apathetic.

Irrespective of the symptoms, depression is different from normal sadness as it can totally take over our day-to-day life, damaging our ability to function effectively in any capacity. We desperately look for relief from the intense and unrelenting feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness.

Depression has a number of different causes which will be different from person to person and can occur through a combination of factors. With the exception of manic depression, it does not seem to be inherited through genes although some of us are more prone to depression than others. This is because of the way we're made, or how our emotional system has responded to

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experiences or family background. Past experiences can have a profound effect on how we feel about ourselves in the present, and if those feelings are very negative, they can be the start of a downward spiral. In many cases, the first time someone becomes depressed, it will be sparked off by an unwelcome or traumatic event, such as losing a job, going through divorce, being physically attacked or raped. It's not just the negative experience that causes the depression, but how we deal with it. If the feelings provoked are not expressed or explored at the time, they fester and contribute towards depression. It's important to acknowledge and grieve over what we have lost in order to be able to move on successfully.

There is a major characteristic about depression that we must always be aware of when turning our minds to fighting and defeating it: Depression feeds on itself.

In other words, we get depressed and then we get more depressed about being depressed. Negative thoughts become automatic and are difficult for us to challenge. Being in a state of depression can then, itself, become a bigger problem than the difficulties that caused it in the first place. We need to break the hold that the depression has on us.

Depression can manifest in many different ways and we don't always realise what's going on because the problems seem to be physical, not mental. Perhaps we tell ourselves we are simply feeling tired or affected by the weather. To recognise depression in ourselves, a friend or a loved one, read through the list below which are the most common signs. Identifying with more than three of these makes depression highly likely.

- Being restless and agitated.
- Having difficulty sleeping, or feeling tired and lacking energy.
- Realising that we are doing less and less.
- Self-harming or being occupied with thoughts of suicide.

- Developing physical aches and pains with no physical cause.
- Not deriving pleasure out of things which we usually enjoy doing.
- Blaming ourselves and feelings of guilt about day to day actions.
- Loss of self-confidence and a preoccupation with negative thoughts.
- Using tobacco, alcohol or other drugs more than usual.
- Not eating properly and losing or putting on weight.
- Noticing that we have started to cry a lot.
- Being unusually irritable or impatient.
- Loss of interest in sex.
- Finding it hard to concentrate or make decisions.
- A sense of feeling numb, empty, despairing or helpless.
- Having difficulty remembering things.
- Feeling low-spirited for much of the time, every day.
- Distancing ourselves from our friends and not asking for help.
- Taking a bleak, pessimistic view of the future.

This list or parts of it can be found anywhere on the internet. A very commonly searched phrase on Google is "Signs of depression". Many of these sites simply recycle the same familiar information about negative self-statements, affirmations and biochemical imbalances. A few might tell us something of value, but the vast majority are fundamentally commercial sites designed to sell us something. Perhaps online therapy, or for us to click on banner advertising to generate income for the website owner.

Encouragingly, there is no isolation here, below are just a few of the famous people who have been treated for depression: Winston Churchill, Jim Carrey, Woody Allen, Agatha Christie, Charles Dickens, T.S. Eliot, Nelly Furtado, Ernest Hemingway, Margaux Hemingway, Janet Jackson, John Keats, Beyonce, Hugh Laurie, Paul Merton, Brian May, Michelangelo, Gwyneth Paltrow, Diana, Princess of Wales, Rachmaninoff, Charlotte

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Rambling, John D Rockefeller, Mark Rothko, Robbie Williams, J.K. Rowling, Will Self, Brooke Shields, Britney Spears, Catherine Tate, Leo Tolstoy, Mike Wallace, Evelyn Waugh, Tennessee Williams, Owen Wilson, amongst countless others.

Aaron Beck's work in the 60's and 70s created a far greater understanding towards depression and the benefits of 'cognitive therapy'. His two seminal works, 'Depression: Causes and Treatments' and some years later 'Cognitive Therapy and Emotional Disorders' in my view moved away from empirical beliefs and moved much more towards an empathetic and a person centred approach.

There is no evidence to the popular rumour that depression is caused by a lack of chemicals in our brain.

An increase of certain chemicals to our brain can, however, suppress many of the symptoms of depression. I believe there are only a very few situations where medication and therapy work well together. In many cases I have had examples where the client can fall back into depression after a few months. I do wonder whether the anti-depressants can darken that shadow between the knowing and the doing. At some point I believe the most effective work will be done in the absence of these medications, although there may well be a right and wrong time for that. Treatment simply through medication does no more than, at best, paper over cracks. When we do this the cracks just become bigger. We can not solve depression with a pill. There are no easy answers.



"Sustainable Empowerment" is a new approach to psychotherapy and counselling developed by Richard Gosling that can help in building a stronger and more loving You.

Richard specialises in "Trauma Therapy" and "Crisis Counselling", is a member of the UK Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners and is offering his help and services in West London.

For more information on "Sustainable Empowerment" please visit www.sustainable-empowerment.co.uk or get in touch with Richard via the following email address: richard@sustainable-empowerment.co.uk