

Mental health in primary care

Depression

Common symptoms

Mood and motivation:

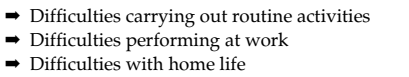
- ➔ Continuous low mood
- ➔ Loss of interest or pleasure
- ➔ Hopelessness
- ➔ Helplessness
- ➔ Worthlessness

Psychological:

- ➔ Guilt/negative attitude to self
- ➔ Poor concentration/memory
- ➔ Thoughts of death or suicide
- ➔ Tearfulness

Physical:

- ➔ Slowing down or agitation
- ➔ Tiredness/lack of energy
- ➔ Sleep problems
- ➔ Disturbed appetite (weight loss/increase)

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- ➔ Difficulties carrying out routine activities
 - ➔ Difficulties performing at work
 - ➔ Difficulties with home life
 - ➔ Withdrawal from friends and social activities.

Depression is common and treatable

- ➔ Depression *does not* mean weakness
- ➔ Depression *does not* mean laziness
- ➔ Depression *does mean* that you have a medical disorder which requires treatment.

Common triggers

Psychological:

- Major life events, eg
- ➔ Recent bereavement
 - ➔ Relationship problems
 - ➔ Unemployment
 - ➔ Moving house
 - ➔ Stress at work
 - ➔ Financial problems.

Other:

- ➔ Family history of depression
- ➔ Childbirth
- ➔ Menopause
- ➔ Seasonal changes
- ➔ Chronic medical conditions
- ➔ Alcohol and substance use disorders.

Illness:

- ➔ Infectious diseases
- ➔ Influenza hepatitis.

Medication:

- ➔ Antihypertensives
- ➔ H2 blockers
- ➔ Oral contraceptives
- ➔ Corticosteroids.

What treatments can help?

Both therapies are most often needed:

Supportive therapy for:

- ➔ stress/life problems
- ➔ patterns of negative thinking
- ➔ prevention of further episode.

Medication:

- ➔ for depressed mood or loss of interest/pleasure for two or more weeks and at least four of the symptoms mentioned earlier
- ➔ for little response to supportive therapy (counselling)
- ➔ for recurrent depression
- ➔ for a family history of depression.

About medication

Effective

Usually works faster than other methods.

Treatment plan

must be strictly adhered to.

Drugs

- ➔ are not addictive
- ➔ interact in a harmful way with alcohol
- ➔ improvement takes time, generally three weeks for a response
- ➔ do not take in combination with St John's wort.

Side-effects

must be reported, but generally start improving within 7–10 days.

Progress

- ➔ same medication should continue
- ➔ unless a different decision is taken by the doctor
- ➔ medication should not be discontinued without doctor's knowledge in case a drug is not effective, another drug may be tried.

Time period

Medication to be continued at least four to six months after initial improvement.

Ongoing review

is necessary over the next few months.

Increase time spent on enjoyable activities

- ➔ Set small achievable, daily goals for doing pleasant activities
- ➔ Plan time for activities and increase the amount of time spent on these each week
- ➔ Plan things to look forward to in future
- ➔ Keep busy even when it is hard to feel motivated
- ➔ Try to be with other people/family members.

Problem-solving plan

Discuss

problems with partner/family members, trusted friend or counsellor.

Distance

yourself to look at problems as though you were an observer.

Options

Work out possible solutions to solve the problems.

Pros and cons

Examine advantages and disadvantages of each option.

Set a time frame

to examine and resolve problems.

Make an action plan

for working through the problems over a period of time.

Review

Progress made in solving problems.

Change attitudes and way of thinking

'I will always feel this way; things will never change.'

Instead:

'These feelings are temporary. With treatment, things will look better in a few weeks.'

'It's all my fault. I do not seem to be able to do anything right.'

Instead:

'These are negative thoughts that are the result of depression. What evidence for this do I really have?'