

## **What is Depression**

All of us will go through periods when we feel low but Depression is more than this, feelings of persistent low mood or sadness will last for weeks if not months. It is not something that can not be snapped out of; you cannot simply pull yourself together. Depression ranges from mild depression to severe depression accompanied with psychotic episodes.

### ***Types of depression include:***

#### **Major depressive disorder**

A major depressive episode with symptoms lasting most of the day disrupts normal routine with significantly debilitating symptoms.

#### **Dysthymia**

Long term symptoms but less debilitating than major depression. Sufferers may have long term symptoms.

#### **Postnatal depression**

Females may experience depression after childbirth; this is more than baby blues. Some new mothers may experience postpartum psychosis, experiencing psychotic episodes.

#### **Bi polar depression**

Also referred to as manic depression, sufferers experience periods of extreme highs and lows. Some may have periods of highs or manic for weeks or months. Some sufferers experience mild manic episodes (hypermania) and periods of depression others experience extreme highs.

There are no exact causes of Bi polar depression but it is found to be more likely in those who have family members diagnosed with Bi polar depression.

#### **Seasonal affective disorder**

Also known as winter disorder, sufferers experience symptoms due to reduction in daylight hours. Symptoms may include low motivation, low mood and feelings of tiredness.

## **Possible Causes**

There are many possible causes of depression they can usually be categorised under the following headings: Biological, psychological or social. Common causes can be found below but the list is by no means exhaustive and is unique to the individual.

- Major depression seems to run in families but it can also occur in individuals who have no history.
- Low self esteem pessimistic attitudes.
- Relationship breakdown
- Loss of job.
- Certain medication may make you more likely to develop depression.
- Substance misuse, alcohol is a known depressant others may affect chemical imbalances in the brain.
- Coming into prison, away from families & support structures.
- Bereavement.
- Abuse.
- Serious illness.

## **Signs & Symptoms**

Depression affects people in different ways and can present in physical as well as psychological symptoms. Some common signs or symptoms can be found below you may recognise some of them in individuals you are supporting.

- Persistent low mood, over a period of weeks or longer.
- Lack of enjoyment in previously enjoyed activities- Individuals may stop attending the gym, association or visits.
- Isolating self- Losing touch with families/ friends. Sending fewer letters, phone calls visits.
- Changes in appetite, eating more or less than usual.
- Changes to sleep patterns- you may notice individuals not wanting to attend their usual work activity or sleeping through the day or being awake through the night.
- Difficulties concentrating or becoming more irritable- Individuals may be getting into fights on the wing, not doing well in education classes or work.
- Incidents of self harm may occur
- Increased use of substances- May use substances to help them cope in crisis situations, you may notice an individual liaising with others not previously associated with, positive drug tests or requests to see CARAT workers.
- Suicidal thoughts or plans.
- Physical aches and pains.
- Displaying unusual thoughts or behaviours.

## Treatments

Treatments on offer differ from establishment to establishment. Some prisons may have in patient facilities with 24 hour specialist mental health support, others may have Primary mental health services or dual trained nurses.

Treatments offered usually fall into medication, Psychological treatments or holistic/ alternative therapies.

Individuals may be offered medication – Antidepressants or antipsychotics and be monitored by mental health staff.

Psychological treatments may include CBT, Cognitive behavioural therapy which helps to understand thought & behaviour. Developments now include computer CBT and telephone support via IAPT services. Counselling which helps to identify different ways of dealing with problems.

Holistic or Alternative treatments may include gym or fitness programmes, meditation, and aromatherapy.

### ***Differences in Males & Females***

Studies have shown Depression affects males and females differently. Whilst females are more likely to suffer from depression, males are more likely to suffer coronary heart problems following depression than females. Females are more likely to attempt suicide but studies show males are more likely to take their own lives. In a community setting men are least likely to ask for help for support, masking problems with substance misuse. Figures for the prison systems do not represent those within community settings due to the ratio of male to females in custody.

## Further support

There are a range of services and organisations available to provide on going support to those with mental ill health or those supporting them.

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) Mind operates a range of services from housing services to day centres and has a wealth of information available on their website.

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org) is a leading UK charity offering support for those suffering from Depression.

[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk) is a UK based charity providing practical support for those suffering from depression.