

## **MODULE 3: RELIEF FROM DEPRESSION**



The aim of this module is to help you better understand depression, with a view to managing your mood better. This can serve to improve your overall mental health. This module can also help with relapse prevention, by helping you to spot early warning signs, if you have already had therapy.

You can work through this module in your own time and at your own pace. Here are the contents of this module:

### **A – Understanding Depression**

- i) **What is depression?**
- ii) **Symptoms of depression**
- iii) **The thinking-feelings-behaviour link in depression**
- iv) **Causes of depression**
- v) **The maintenance of depression**

## **B – Managing Depression**

- i) **Improving motivation**
- ii) **Improving self-care**
- iii) **Talking to someone**

## **C - Quiz**

## **A - Understanding Depression**

### ***i) What is depression?***

Everyone feels 'down' from time to time, and these feelings are usually fleeting. Depression is more than that. Depression is a constant feeling of sadness, gloom, and loss of interest that is said to typically last for more than two weeks. It is described as a mental state characterised by a sense of inadequacy, hopelessness, despondency and a reduced level of activity compared to baseline. Depressed people often describe their sense of sadness as intense and prolonged. The duration of depression and the associated feelings can be a matter of weeks, months or even years. Sometimes it is difficult to identify the exact cause or trigger.

Depression is regarded as a serious condition that has an impact on both the physical and mental health of an individual. A person who experiences depression can show varying degrees of sadness, despair, and loneliness, sometimes accompanied by inactivity, guilt, loss of concentration, social withdrawal, sleep disturbances and, in more severe cases, suicidal thoughts.

The good news is that there are effective psychological and medical treatments for depression, and it is thought that most depression is manageable and treatable.

### ***ii) Symptoms of depression***

Here is a list of commonly occurring symptoms of depression which could also be early warning signs:

- Feeling down
- Sense of emptiness
- Feeling less interest in things that did interest you before
- Lack of motivation – including for everyday activities
- Sleep problems – either too much or too little. Maybe even disrupted sleep during the night
- Feeling worthless
- Sense of guilt

- Self-critical thinking
- Trouble concentrating
- Eating too little or too much
- Feeling restless and fidgety, unable to sit still
- Sometimes even having thoughts of being better off dead/hurting oneself

**Exercise:** Are there any other symptoms or trigger warnings based on the above that you are aware of or that you have experienced? If so, jot them down here:

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### *iii) The thinking-feelings-behaviour link in depression*

As per the basic principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), we can break down the symptoms of depression into how someone thinks, feels and behaves. This helps us build a better awareness of the depression and what keeps it going (i.e., the maintenance of it).

This table shows some examples:

How you might think	How you might feel	How you might behave
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being hard on yourself e.g., over-thinking past mistakes and failures</li> <li>• Thoughts of worthlessness</li> <li>• Thinking that things are never going to get better/the future is bleak</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Down, upset or tearful</li> <li>• Tired and low in energy</li> <li>• Feeling lonely and withdrawn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Withdrawal from doing pleasurable activities</li> <li>• Isolation from others</li> <li>• Eating more or less</li> <li>• Sleeping more or less than normal</li> <li>• Avoidant of making decisions or difficulty in doing so</li> <li>• Withdrawal from self-care routines</li> </ul>

**Exercise:** Think about your own thoughts, feelings and behaviours related to depression. If you can identify any additional ones to the able above, please jot them down here:

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#### **iv) Causes of depression**



There does not seem to be any one cause or trigger behind depression. However, there is a correlation between depression from any one or more of the following common factors:

#### **Stressful life events**

**Examples include:**

- Losses (e.g., bereavement, loss of a job or a relationship ending)
- Traumatic events (e.g., robbery, an accident, witnessing something disturbing)
- Transitions (e.g., leaving home, starting a new career, retiring or having a baby)

## Negative thinking

### patternsExamples include:

- thinking of the worst possible outcome
- thinking self-critically
- predicting a difficult or undesirable future
- thinking cynically about others

## Early experiences

Some early experiences are thought to render us vulnerable to depression, and **examples include:**

- Poverty
- Lack of opportunity/access barriers
- Abuse
- Lack of nurturing from caregivers



- Perpetual poor physical health
- Bullying

### Physical Health

- Pain
- Long-term (chronic) illness
- Terminal illness
- Lifestyle changes necessitated by illness

**Exercise:** Can you think of any other factors that might contribute to depression, in your experience? If so, please jot down your ideas here:

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## ***V) The maintenance of depression***

In CBT, we are interested in finding out what keeps a problem going. This is referred to as the maintenance of a problem. This section examines some common maintenance factors for depression.

**Lack of Motivation** - Because depression affects how you think, feel, and act, it can make you less motivated to manage day-to-day and even special activities, such as hobbies. The link between depression and lack of motivation is well documented. They often go hand-in-hand. Losing motivation can be a challenging problem because it just further fuels the feelings of sadness and self-critical thoughts. The physical lack of energy that frequently accompanies depression lowers motivation. This can interfere with study, work, and relationships.

Depression is a very common problem, and it might help to remember that you are not alone.

**Ruminating or worrying about problems** - It is common for people who are depressed asking themselves questions like:

- Why is my life like this?
- What is wrong with me?

Sometimes people believe that asking such a question might help to solve a problem. However, research has found that this type of thinking can keep people who are depressed “stuck” in depression. In other words, this type of thinking can maintain the depression.

Consider asking questions like: what can I do now that can help me feel better? Who can I be with right now, that will help me improve my mood? What has helped me feel better in the past?

**Beliefs and assumptions that you hold** - People with depression often have negative beliefs about themselves and the world around them. Examples of such beliefs (and statements that people might make to themselves) include:

- 'I'm not good enough'
- 'I'm a failure'
- 'No one cares about me'
- 'I'm unlovable'

These beliefs could come from life experiences - even from childhood. The problem is that these beliefs are usually not entirely true but can have profound effect on someone's emotions. Learning to challenge these beliefs, to widen perspectives on any given situation, can help you improve your mood.

## **B) Managing Depression**



There are a number of things we can do to manage depression. We will look at several ideas in



this section.

As we know, motivation is a big maintenance actor for depression, so we will look at how motivation can be improved. We will also look at tips on managing self-care and think about reaching out to others

## *i) Improving Motivation*

Luckily, there are ways that we can improve our motivation, and this can bring us back to engaging positively in our lives. This can help us feel better by enhancing our mood and giving us evidence of our abilities.

Here are some tips:

**Writing things down** - One of the things that hinder our motivation is not having a clear plan of action. Writing down goals and breaking them up into specific steps will help in taking action.

**Exercise:** Write down three things you would like to accomplish or engage in this week. Remember to be realistic

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**Setting small goals** - We have a hard time maintaining our motivation when we're not sure what we should be focusing on. Setting goals that are too big seem like they can't be accomplished, so it is hard to get started on them. It is important to start small and to be realistic, and then build up at a pace which will show progress without setting you back.

It might be helpful to first create the big picture of what you want to do and identify the large-scale goals that you want to achieve. Then, these can be broken down into smaller targets that will help to reach the bigger goal.

Having small goals helps to us approach what we want to do in manageable chunks and work around what might have initially seemed a long and difficult grind. By setting small, clearly defined goals, you can measure and look back on the achievement of your goals. This can raise self-confidence as forward progress becomes visible.

**Exercise:** Let's revisit the goals you wrote in the exercise above. Can you break each of them down into smaller targets? Don't worry how small these targets seem. The important thing is to identify them and write them down.

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**Focus on the 'why'** - Knowing **why** you want to accomplish the goals you set is crucial to keeping you motivated as it gives you clarity. Perhaps you're studying to win a scholarship to further your education. Winning the scholarship is your **why**. If the mission is to win the scholarship, you are more likely to work for it, if you keep your **why** in mind.

**Surround Yourself with Positive Influences** – This is said to be an antidote to discouragement. By surrounding yourself with positivity, including positive people, it is easier to believe in yourself and see that your goals are possible to accomplish. People we spend time with have a profound influence over us. Some people say that reading stories of other people overcoming hurdles can be a positive influence.



## *ii) Improving self-care*

Depression affects one's cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physical functioning. When feeling depressed, focusing on your self-care becomes that much more important. Self-care can be on creative, physical, emotional and spiritual levels. Self-care can help our thoughts move into a more positive direction. Depressive thoughts encourage us to believe that nothing will help, or that the relief is temporary. However, step by step, self-care can help us climb out of depressive states.

Here are some ideas and examples of self-care for consideration:

**Exercising** – we all know that exercising regularly can make a great difference to mood. It releases natural chemicals in the body called endorphins, which are sometimes known as ‘feel good’ chemicals. People often report that exercise is an effective distraction from worries and getting at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily is recommended. This can be anything from yoga to walking, gardening to jogging, or even hoovering the house. If 30 minutes is too daunting, remembering the small goals exercise we did above, think about starting with 10-15 minutes a day. Every day or two, add an extra 5 minutes until you hit the 30 minutes. Keeping a record of the amount of exercise done daily can also be a great motivator.

**Eating healthily** - Although no single nutrient or eating plan can alleviate depression, good overall nutrition is essential for your mental well-being generally. Our brains, like other organs, respond to what we eat and drink.

Here is a list of nutrients that nutrition scientists recommend we include in our daily diet:



- Essential vitamins and Minerals
- Complex carbohydrates
- Protein
- Fatty acids

It is recommended that we moderate how much of the following we consume:

- Sugar
- Deep fried foods
- Processed and refined foods

Finally, we are recommended to cut back on caffeinated and alcoholic drinks. Alcohol is a well-known depressant and can hamper our sleep. It is therefore really important that you only consume a minimal amount of alcohol.

**Quality sleep** - Getting a good night's sleep is a major key in managing depression. When we are well rested, our energy levels improve and we may also just feel a lot more upbeat. That's because sleep is more than just rest. In the deepest stage, sleep recharges the bodily system and rejuvenates us physically and mentally. 7-8 hours of sleep per night is the recommended average for adults.

**Engaging in pleasurable activities** – We all have our own ideas of what a pleasurable activity is, and this varies from person to person. Examples include cooking, listening to music, reading a book, volunteering, gardening, a night out with friends or dancing in your own space. The pleasure felt from such engagement can decrease our levels of stress hormones and help us to reconnect with ourselves and others.

**Practicing self-compassion** – we need to be kind and gentle towards ourselves when we feel we are falling short of our own or others' expectations of us, or when things are not going as we'd hoped. This is especially important when we are feeling depressed, as being harsh towards ourselves will make us feel even worse. Saying kind things to ourselves, like 'you did your best; that was really hard so well done for trying' can help soothe us.

**Exercise:** Are there any other self-care activities that you have engaged in which have been helpful to you, and which could assist you in managing a relapse? If so, jot down your ideas here, to help remind you in the future

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### ***iii) Talking to someone***





Talking to friends or family can help if you are feeling low. If you have mild to moderate depression, in addition to the above tips, it might help to consider talking to a mental health professional. If you have a more severe depression, you might benefit from medication in addition to talking therapy. There are many kinds of talking therapy, such as CBT and IPT, and both have a strong evidence base for treating depression effectively.

Feel free to contact us if you are thinking of a talking therapy. Please contact us via the website:  
<https://ictherapies.co.uk>

## C – Quiz



1. Which of the following options best defines depression? Choose one option.
  - a. A sense of low mood and loss in the afternoons.
  - b. A constant feeling of sadness, gloom, and loss of interest that typically lasts for more than two weeks
  - c. A feeling of sadness and guilt lasting for a day.
  - d. Feeling you can't eat, sleep or think properly when on holiday.
2. Name the symptoms of depression from the list below.
  - a) Feeling down;
  - b) sense of emptiness;
  - c) feeling less interest in things that did interest you before;
  - d) lack of motivation – including for everyday activities;
  - e) sleep problems – either too much or too little or disrupted sleep during the night;
  - f) feeling worthless
  - g) all of the above

- 3. What are the two main types of talking therapies that have a good evidence base for managing depression?**
- a) CBT and IPT**
  - b) Not telling anyone how you feel**
  - c) Cancelling your plans with friends**
- 4. What are the ways in which motivation can be improved. Please select all the right answers from below.**
- a) setting goals;**
  - b) engaging in pleasurable activities;**
  - c) focusing on the whys of what you do;**
  - d) increasing positive influences**
  - e) Staying in bed all day.**

5. Please select list below 3 examples of negative beliefs that people with depression might commonly hold.

- A) 'I'm not good enough'; '
- B) 'I'm a failure';
- C) I always get a birthday present
- D) 'I'm unlovable'
- E) I always enjoy going for a run.

6. How many hours' worth of sleep per night is recommended for adults? Choose one of the following

options:a. 8-9

- b. 6
- c. 6-7
- d. 7-8



## ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ

1. B
2. G
3. A
4. **A, B, C, D,**
5. **A, B, D**
6. d