

The Royal College of Psychiatrists produces:

- a wide range of mental health information for patients, carers and professionals,
- factsheets on treatments in psychiatry such as antidepressants and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

These can be downloaded from our website:
www.rcpsych.ac.uk.

A range of materials for carers of people with mental health problems has also been produced by the 'Partners in Care' campaign. These can be downloaded from
www.partnersincare.co.uk.

For a catalogue of our materials, contact the Leaflets Department, Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG. Tel: 020 7235 2351 ext. 259; Fax 020 7235 1935; e-mail: leaflets@rcpsych.ac.uk.

This leaflet was produced by the Royal College of Psychiatrists' Public Education Editorial Sub-Committee.

Series Editor: Dr Philip Timms
Expert Review: Dr David Baldwin
Editorial Board: Dr Ros Ramsay, Dr Martin
Briscoe, Deborah Hart

User and carer input: Royal College of Psychiatrists'
Special Committee of
Patients and Carers

Cartoons by Martin Davies.

© Royal College of Psychiatrists, all rights reserved.

This leaflet may not be reproduced in whole or in part without the permission of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

This leaflet was last updated in April 2006.



Royal College of Psychiatrists

Registered charity number 228636

Help is
at hand

Men and Depression



The Royal College of Psychiatrists

Introduction

This leaflet is for any man who is depressed, their friends and their family. Men seem to suffer from depression just as often as women, but they are less likely to ask for help. This leaflet gives some basic facts about depression, how it affects men in particular, and how to get help.

Why is it important?

Depression causes a huge amount of suffering. It is a major reason for people taking time off work. Many people who kill themselves have been depressed – so it is potentially fatal. However, it is easy to treat, and this is best done as early as possible.

What's the difference between feeling miserable and being depressed?

Everyone has times in their lives when they feel down or depressed. It is usually for a good reason, does not dominate your life and does not last for a long time. However, if the depression goes on for a long time, or becomes very severe, you may find yourself stuck and unable to lift yourself out of the depression. This is what doctors call a 'depressive illness'. Some people suffer from manic depression (also called bipolar affective disorder). They have periods of bad depression, but also times of great 'elation' and over activity. These can be just as harmful as the periods of depression. (See our leaflet on Manic Depression/Bipolar disorder).

What are the signs and symptoms?

If you are depressed, you will probably notice some of the following:

Mind

You:

- feel unhappy, miserable, down, depressed. It just won't go away and can be worse at a particular time of day, often first thing in the morning
- can't enjoy anything
- can't concentrate properly
- feel guilty about things that have nothing to do with you
- become pessimistic
- start to feel hopeless, and perhaps even suicidal.

Body

You:

- can't get to sleep, and wake early in the morning and/or throughout the night
- loose interest in sex
- can't eat
- lose weight.

Other people may notice that you:

- perform less well at work
- seem unusually quiet and unable to talk about things
- worry about things more than usual
- are more irritable than usual
- complain more about vague physical problems
- are not looking after yourself properly – you may not bother to shave, wash your hair, look after your clothes.

How is depression different for men?

Symptoms

There is no evidence for a completely separate type of 'male depression'. However, there is evidence that some symptoms of depression are more common in men than in women.

These include:

- irritability
- sudden anger
- increased loss of control
- greater risk-taking
- aggression.

Men are also more likely to commit suicide.

Getting help

Men seem to suffer from depression just as often as women, but are less likely to ask for help. It may also be that men try to deal with their depression by using drugs and alcohol. This might account for the fact that, although men are diagnosed as having depression less than women, they abuse drugs and alcohol rather more.

Men's attitudes and behaviour

Compared with women, men tend to be more competitive and concerned with power and success. Most men don't like to admit that they feel fragile or that they need help. They feel that they should rely on themselves, and that it is somehow weak to have to depend on someone else, even for a short time. So they are less likely to talk about their feelings with their friends, loved ones or their doctors. This may be why they don't get the help they need.



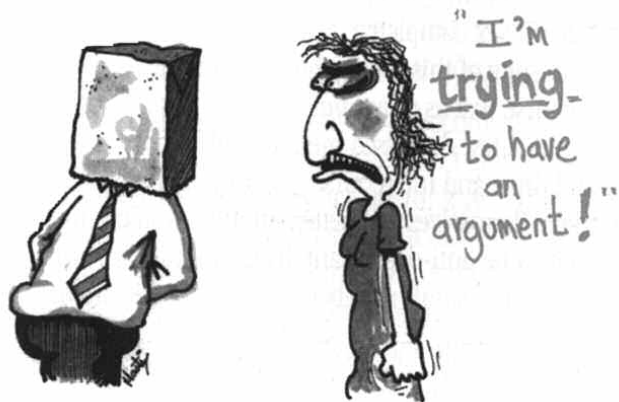
This traditional view of how men should be – always tough and self-reliant – is also held by some women. Some men worry that, if they talk about their feelings of depression, their partner may reject them. Even professionals may share this view, and do not spot depression in men as often as they should.

How do men cope?

Instead of talking about how they feel, men may use alcohol or drugs to feel better. This usually makes things worse, certainly in the long run. Your work will suffer and alcohol often leads to irresponsible, unpleasant or dangerous behaviour. Men may also focus more on their work than their relationships or home life. This can cause conflicts with your wife or partner. All of these things make depression more likely.

Relationships

For married men, research has shown that trouble in a marriage or long-term relationship is the single most common problem associated with depression. Men can't cope with disagreements as well as women. Arguments actually make men feel very physically uncomfortable. They try to avoid arguments or difficult discussions. The partner will want to talk about a problem, but he will do his best to avoid it. The partner then feels ignored and tries to talk about it more, which makes the man feel he is being nagged. So, he withdraws further, which makes his partner feel even more ignored and so on ... This vicious circle can destroy a relationship.



Separation and divorce

Men have traditionally seen themselves as being in control of their families' lives. However, the process of separation and divorce is most often started by women. Of all men, those who are divorced are most likely to kill themselves, probably because depression is more common and more severe in this group. This may be because, as well as losing their main relationship:

- they often lose touch with their children
 - they may have to move to live in a different place
 - they often find themselves short of money.
- These are stressful events in themselves, quite apart from the stress of the break-up, and may bring on depression.

Sex

When men are depressed, they feel less good about their bodies and less sexy. Many go off sex completely. Several recent studies suggest that, in spite of this, men who are depressed have intercourse just as often, but they don't feel as satisfied as usual. A few depressed men actually report an increase in sexual drive and intercourse, possibly as a way of trying to make themselves feel better. Another problem may be that some antidepressant drugs reduce sex-drive in a small number of men. However, the good news is that, as the depression improves, so will sexual desire, performance and satisfaction.

It's worth remembering that it can happen the other way round. Impotence (difficulty in getting or keeping an erection) can bring about depression. Again, this is a problem for which it is usually possible to find effective help.

Pregnancy and children

We have known for many years that some mothers feel severely depressed after having a baby. It is only recently that we have realised that more than 1 in 10 fathers also suffer psychological problems during this time. This shouldn't really be surprising. We know that

major events in people's lives, even good ones like moving house, can make you depressed. And this particular event changes your life more than any other. Suddenly, you have to spend much more of your time looking after your partner, and possibly other children, and you may be very tired.

On an intimate level, new mothers tend to be less interested in sex for a number of months. Simple tiredness is the main problem, although you may take it personally and feel that you are being rejected. You may have to adjust, perhaps for the first time, to taking second place in your partner's affections. You may also find that you can't spend so much time at work.



New fathers are more likely to become depressed if their partner is depressed, if they aren't getting on with their partner, or if they are unemployed. This isn't important just from the father's point of view. It will affect the

mother and may have an impact on how the baby grows and develops in the first few months.

Unemployment and retirement

Leaving work, for any reason, can be stressful. Recent research has shown that up to 1 in 7 men who become unemployed will develop a depressive illness in the next 6 months.

After relationship difficulties, unemployment is the thing most likely to push a man into a serious depression – work is often the main source of a man's sense of worth and self-esteem. You may lose the signs of your success, such as the company car. You may have to adjust to being at home, looking after children, while your wife or partner becomes the bread-winner.



From a position of being in control, you may face a future over which you have little, especially if it takes a long time to find another job.

You are more likely to become depressed if you are shy, if you don't have a close relationship or if you don't manage to find another job. Depression itself can make it harder to get another job.

Even retiring from work at the usual age can be difficult for many men, especially if your partner continues to work. It can be hard to adjust to losing the structure of your day and your contact with colleagues.

Gay men and depression

On the whole, gay men do not suffer from depression any more than straight men. However, it seems that gay teenagers and young adults are more likely to become depressed, possibly due to the stress of 'coming out'.

Suicide

Men are around 3 times more likely to kill themselves than women. Suicide is commonest among men who are separated, widowed or divorced and is more likely if someone is a heavy drinker.

Over the last few years, men have become more likely to kill themselves, particularly those aged between 16 and 24 years and those between 39 and 54 years. We don't yet know the reason for this.



We do know that around half the people who kill themselves will have seen their GP in the previous 4 weeks – although not necessarily to discuss their emotional state. However, fewer men than women will have seen their GP in the year before their suicide. We also know that about 2 out of 3 people who kill themselves will have talked about it to friends or family.

Asking someone if he is feeling suicidal will not put the idea into his head or make it more likely that he will kill himself. Even if someone is not very good at talking about how he is feeling, it is important to ask if you have any suspicion – and to take such ideas seriously.

For a man who feels suicidal, there is nothing more demoralising than to feel that others do not take him seriously. He will often have taken some time to pluck up the courage to tell anyone about it.

If you find yourself feeling so bad that you have thought about suicide, it can be a great relief to talk about it.

Violence

Some studies have shown that men who commit violent crimes are more likely to get depressed than men who don't. However, we don't know if the depression makes their violence more likely, or if it's just the way they lead their lives.

Helping men

Many men find it difficult to ask for help when they are depressed – it can feel unmanly and weak. It may be easier for men to ask for help if those who give that help take into account men's special needs.



Men who are depressed are more likely to talk about the physical symptoms of their depression than the emotional and psychological ones. This may be one reason why doctors sometimes don't diagnose it. If you are feeling wretched, don't hold back – tell your GP.

It can help to see depression as a result of chemical changes in the brain and/or as the inevitable cost of living in a demanding and difficult world. It is nothing to do with being weak or unmanly and it can be helped. Both talking and medication can be important ways to help you get better.

If a depressed man is married, or in a steady relationship – straight or gay – his partner should be involved so that she/he can understand what is happening. This will make it less likely for the depression to interfere with their relationship.

Some men don't feel comfortable talking about themselves, and so may be reluctant to consider psychotherapy. However, it is a powerful way of relieving depression and works well for many men.

Helping yourself

Don't bottle things up – if you've had a major upset in your life, try to tell someone how you feel about it.

Keep active – get out of doors and take some exercise, even if it's only a walk. This will help to keep you physically fit and you will sleep better. It can also help you not to dwell on painful thoughts and feelings.

Eat properly – you may not feel very hungry, but you should eat a balanced diet, with lots of fruit and vegetables. It's easy to lose weight and run low on vitamins when you are depressed.

Avoid alcohol and drugs – alcohol may make you feel better for a couple of hours, but it will make you more depressed in the long run. The same goes for street drugs, particularly amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy.

Don't get upset if you can't sleep – do something restful that you enjoy, like listening to the radio or watching television. Use relaxation techniques – if you feel tense all the time, try exercise, yoga, massage, aromatherapy etc.

Do something you enjoy – set some time aside regularly each week to do something you really enjoy – exercise, reading, a hobby.

Check out your lifestyle – a lot of people who have depression are perfectionists and tend to drive themselves too hard. You may need to set yourself more realistic targets and reduce your workload.

Take a break – this may be easier said than done, but it can be really helpful to get away and out of your normal routine for a few days. Even a few hours can be helpful.

Read about depression – there are now many books and websites about depression. Not only can they help you to cope, but they may also help friends and relatives to understand what you are going through.

Remember, in the long run, depression can be helpful – some people come out of it stronger and coping better than before. You may see situations and relationships more clearly, and may now have the strength and wisdom to make important decisions and changes that you were avoiding before.

Finding more help

The best place to start is your GP. He or she will be able to discuss the options with you.

It is true that many men are concerned that the information held by their GPs may need to be given in medical reports, and so may damage their chances in work. It's important to remember that, in the UK, it is illegal for an employer to fire you – or not hire you – solely because you have a diagnosis of a certain disorder. Their only grounds for this are that your condition (whatever it is) will actually interfere with your ability to do the job.

Depression may be due to physical illness, so it is important that you have a proper physical check-up. If you are already receiving treatment for some physical disorder, your GP will need to know because of the possible interactions between drugs. Any worries about confidentiality should be discussed with your GP.

If you really feel that you can't talk about it with anyone you know, try Samaritans 24 hour telephone helpline. This will allow you to discuss things anonymously.

Depression can be as much of an illness as pneumonia or breaking your leg. You shouldn't feel embarrassed or ashamed about it. The most important thing to remember is to ask for the help you need, when you need it.

If you need more information, or to talk to somebody confidentially, the following lists of publications and other organisations may be helpful.

Remember – depression is common, it is treatable and you are entitled to the help you need.

Further reading

See our Depression leaflet
www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info or Tel: 020 7235
2351 ext 259

Audio

Coping with Depression
Talking Life, PO Box 1, Wirral L47 7DD
Two cassette audio-pack or CD-Rom with advice
about depression, cognitive therapy techniques
and relaxation. £8.50 for shorter version/one
audio tape and £13.99 for two cassette
version, or CD-Rom (p&p) included. (Cheques
payable to 'Talking Life'). Tel: 0151 632 0662.

Coping with Bereavement
Talking Life, PO Box 1, Wirral L47 7DD
Audio-pack with two tapes giving support,
comfort and practical help for people who have
been bereaved. £13.99 (p&p) included.
(Cheques payable to 'Talking Life'). Tel: 0151-
632 0662.

Support groups and organisations

Aware Defeat Depression,
66 Donegall Street, Belfast BT1 2GT
Belfast Tel: 028 90 321 734
Fax: 028 90 321 735
Derry/Londonderry Tel: 028 71 260 602
Fax: 028 71 309 229 www.aware-ni.org
Assists and supports those suffering from
depression and their carers in Northern Ireland.

CALM Campaign against Living Miserably,
Tel: 0800 58 58 58 Lines open 5pm – 3am.
The campaign against living miserably is about
fighting depression amongst young men.

Depression Alliance, 212 Spitfire Studios,
63-71 Collier Street, London N1 0BE
Tel: 0845 1232320
Email: information@depressionalliance.org
www.depressionalliance.org
Information, help and advice for those suffering
from depression and for their carers.

Depression Alliance Scotland, 3 Grosvenor
Gardens, Edinburgh EH12 5JU
Tel: 0131 467 3050 from 10am to 2pm
weekdays except Wednesdays.
www.depressionalliancescotland.org
Provides information and help to people suffering
from depression.

Manic Depression Fellowship: The BiPolar
Organisation, Castle Works, 21 St. George's
Road, London SE1 6ES.
Tel: 08456 340 540 Fax: 020 7793 2639
Email mdf@mdf.org.uk www.mdf.org.uk

Provides support, advice and information for people with manic depression, their friends and carers.

Men's Health Forum, Tavistock House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 0HR

Tel: 020 7388 4449 Fax: 020 7388 4477

Email: office@menshealthforum.org.uk

www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Provides an independent and authoritative voice for male health and tackles issues affecting the health and well-being of boys and men in England and Wales. Organises the annual National Men's Health Week.

Men to Men, 58 Howard Street, Belfast BT1 6PJ

Tel: 028 9024 7027,

Helpline: 028 9023 7779

www.mentomen.org

Provides one-to-one counselling on a range of issues.

Mind, Granta House, 15-19 Broadway, London E15 4BQ

Tel: 020 8519 2122 Fax: 020 8522 1725

Email: contact@mind.org.uk

Mindinfo: 0845 766 0163

www.mind.org.uk

Offers confidential help on mental health issues and publishes a wide range of literature on all aspects of mental health.

Mind Cymru, 3rd Floor, Quebec House, Castlebridge, Cowbridge Road East, Cardiff CF11 9AB

Tel: 029 2039 5123

Fax: 029 2034 6585

Samaritans, The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

Tel: 08457 909090 (UK) or 1850 609090

(Eire) Email: jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org.uk

Samaritans is a registered charity based in the UK and Republic of Ireland that provides confidential emotional support to any person who is suicidal or despairing.

SANELINE: 0845 767 8000

A national out-of-hours telephone helpline for anyone affected by mental illness. Open from 12 noon to 11 pm weekdays and 12 noon to 6 pm at the weekend.

The Life Academy, 9 Chesham Road, Guildford, Surrey GU1 3LS

Tel: 01483 301170

Fax: 01483 300981

Runs courses and produces literature on the subject of retirement for employees and employers. Produces a newsletter dedicated to mid-life and retirement planning.

The Rainbow Project, 8 Commercial Court, Belfast BT1 2NB

Belfast Tel: 028 9031 9030

Fax: 028 9031 9031

Derry/Londonderry Tel: 028 7128 3030

Fax: 028 7128 3060

www.rainbow-project.org

Aims to address the physical, mental and emotional health of gay and bisexual men in Northern Ireland.

References

Thase, F.E. Natural history and preventative treatment of recurrent mood disorders. *Annual Review of Medicine* (1999);

<http://med.annualreviews.org/cgi/content/full/50/1/453>

NICE Clinical guideline 23 Depression – Management of depression in primary and secondary care. December 2004 National Institute for Clinical Excellence, London
<http://www.nice.org.uk/page.aspx?o=235213>

Anderson, I.M., et al. Effectiveness of antidepressants: evidence based guidelines for treating depressive disorders with antidepressants. *Journal of Psychopharmacology* (2000) 14 (1):3-20.
<http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journals/details/j0102.html>

Haddad, P., Lejoyeux, M., & Young, A., Problems stopping: antidepressant discontinuation reactions. *British Medical Journal* (1998) 316:1105-1106.
<http://bmj.com/cgi/content/full/316/7138/1105>

Luoma, J., Martin, C.E., & Pearson, J.L. Contact with mental health and primary care providers before suicide: a review of the evidence. *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2002) 159:6 909-916

Möller-Leimkühler, A.M., Barriers to help-seeking by men: a review of sociocultural and clinical literature with particular reference to depression. *Journal of Affective Disorders* (September 2002) Vol. 71, Issues 1-3:1-9

Winkler, D. et al. Gender differences in the psychopathology of depressed inpatients. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences* (2003) 254, 209-214

Ramchandani P., Stein A., Evans J., O'Connor T.G., Paternal depression in the postnatal period and child development: a prospective population study. *The Lancet* (25 June 2005) Vol. 365, Issue 9478:2201-2205

Copyright: © Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2006