

# Dealing with low mood and depression

## Low mood and life's ups and downs

It's natural to feel sad, low or despondent in response to setbacks, life's events and difficulties.

Someone with a congenital heart condition might, at times, face additional challenges that can affect their mood, such as: changes in symptoms experienced, feeling different from others, deterioration in health, possible physical limits on exercise and activities, waiting for and recovery from surgery, bereavement and concerns about the future and life expectancy issues.

*"...many of us have had dark spells. The combination of feeling different, and other things going on in our lives and how our GUCH-ness affects those things can be a big burden at times ...".*

Getting down and feeling low can be a normal reaction to these events, as can the experience of other feelings like anxiety and anger. At these times it is important to focus on taking care of yourself and getting support (see the recovery and self-help section).

*"I think it's a club that we all join from time to time. Don't be too hard on yourself, absorb yourself in something you enjoy - a book, a cd, a call to a friend. Every little helps."*  
Keano

## Depression

Depression is when low feelings continue for a longer period of time and become more intense, so that they start to interfere with daily life. This can lead to despair, feeling hopeless, sleep problems, negative or morbid thoughts, agitation or lack of energy. People often withdraw and cut themselves off from other people when feeling depressed.

Unfortunately, because of the stigma that surrounds emotional and mental health issues, some people find it hard to speak about their concerns and to reach out for help. I would like to encourage you – please don't suffer in silence – talk to someone. Contact your GP as there are sources of support and treatments for depression. There are also many self help organisations and the Samaritans are on the other end of the telephone 24 hours a day if you feel despairing or have suicidal thoughts.

*"Talking to someone had really helped me understand myself for once and accept that I needed to put myself first."* Gilly

Depression is a common experience and can affect 1 in 5 people at some time in their life.

## Recovery and Self-help



### Talk to someone - get support

- phone a friend or family member
- phone a helpline , join a self-help group
- talk to your GP or other healthcare professional



### Keep active

- occupy your mind and distract yourself through activities
- gardening, DIY, computer games, film/TV, books, going for a walk
- try and do something you enjoy everyday



### Get creative

- express your thoughts and feelings
- paint, draw, write, dance, play music



### Take care of yourself

- eat well
- take exercise
- take time to de-stress and relax



### Challenge negative attitudes

- try not to be too hard on yourself
- notice negative thinking and try and counteract it or occupy your mind with something else
- treat yourself with kindness and compassion



### Get involved

- keep up with friends
- get involved in community activities
- help someone else out

## Treatment and recovery

Talk to your GP about how you are feeling and possible treatments for depression such as talking therapies and anti depressant medication. If your depression is severe the GP can also refer you to the local community mental health team for assessment.

**Anti-depressant medication** can be an effective treatment for some people. Check out with your doctor the possible interactions with any other medications you might be taking. It can take up to 4 weeks before anti-depressants start to work and it is important to taper them gradually in consultation with the GP when stopping.

**Talking treatments** such as counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy can also be very effective. Your GP might be able to refer you to a service or there might be other community options locally.

For more information on accessing talking therapies please see (or ask for a copy to be posted to you)

'How to Access Counselling and Psychological Services' on the GUCH website  
<http://www.guch.org.uk/info/htacaps>

*"The counselling has helped me to let go of the guilt I feel and the constant blame I place on myself for everything going wrong. Without counselling I'd still be tormenting myself". Gilly*

**Taking care and self-help** are really important in dealing with low mood and depression. It is important treat yourself with kindness and compassion. See the section on recovery and self-help for some suggestions and check out the other organisations that can be of help.

### HELPLINES



**The Samaritans 08457 90 90 90**

24 hr helpline for those in despair or feeling suicidal  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org).

**Breathing Space Scotland 0800 83 85 87**

Mon-Thurs 6pm-2am + Fri 6pm–Mon 6am  
For people who are down and depressed

**Aware - Northern Ireland 08451 20 29 61**

Mon- Fri 9am - 1pm  
Advice and information for people who feel depressed

**PAPYRUS Helpline: 0800 068 41 41**

Mon-Fri 10am-5pm + 7pm-10pm and Sat/Sun 2-5pm  
For under 35's and people worried about them.  
<http://www.papyrus-uk.org/>

## Helpful organisations

**MIND** has a website full of information on all sorts of mental health topics including depression, anti depressant medication, talking therapies.

They also have an info-line: 0300 123 3393 (Mon-Fri 9am-6pm)

<http://www.mind.org.uk/>

**The Depression Alliance** is a UK based charity that provides information on depression and has a network of self-help groups across the country

0845 123 2330 <http://www.depressionalliance.org/>

### BOOKS



#### **Overcoming**

**Depression** by Paul Gilbert: A self-help guide using cognitive behavioural techniques.

**Climbing out of Depression** by Sue Atkinson

**Caring for Someone with Depression** by Toni Battison

**Wales Depression Alliance Cymru** for support and information plus a network of self-help groups in Wales. Email [admin@dacymru.org](mailto:admin@dacymru.org) 029 2069 2891

**Breathing Space Scotland** for people who are down and depressed.

Helpline 0800 83 85 87

[www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk).

**Aware - Northern Ireland** provides advice and information for people experiencing depression.

Helpline - 08451 20 29 61

[www.aware-ni.org.uk](http://www.aware-ni.org.uk)

Don't forget the GUCH Patients Association Message Board and Helpline are there for support.

**GUCH PA Helpline** - free phone 0800 854 759

Information written and collated by Anne Crump, Mental Health Support Worker, GUCH Patients Association. August 2011

For further information or to talk through any emotional or mental health concern you might have please contact me . [guchmh@googlemail.com](mailto:guchmh@googlemail.com) / 020 8240 1165



Supporting young people and adults born with a heart condition. [www.guch.org.uk](http://www.guch.org.uk)