



Look OK...Feel Crap? Depression and Young Adults

One in Ten¹

It is commonly thought that young adulthood is a time of freedom and fun, however for the one in ten young Scots affected by depression and other emotional or mental health conditions, life can be anything but fun.

Depression can be devastating when you are young. It can knock out an academic year and set you back in your studies or at work. It can affect your peer relationships, friendships, your relationship to your family, work colleagues and your love life. As a young adult, you are still forming your personality and developing your own identity. With depression it can be hard to remember how you felt when you were well, which can leave you thinking that these low feelings are your personality.

It can be difficult to see your friends and peers moving on, completing their studies, forming new relationships or getting new jobs, when you perhaps haven't made it to college or university or decided what you want to do in the future. It may feel like everyone else has a clear idea of what they are going on to do. It is important to value your own successes even if you think other people are doing better than you. If you talk to your friends you may find that they have similar thoughts.

What Can Cause Depression?

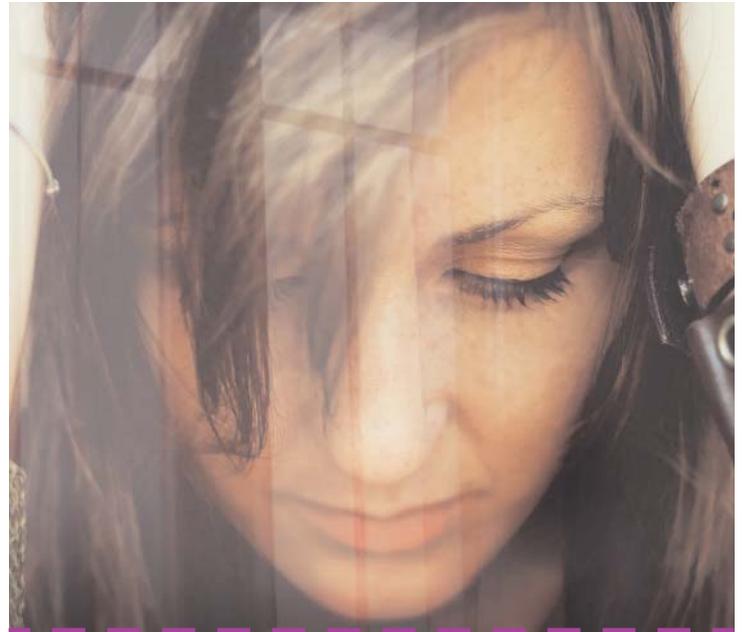
Often, there is no one cause of depression. It can be a complex mix of biological, psychological and social factors. Particularly stressful events can contribute to a person developing problems with their emotional health, including early loss such as parental divorce, abuse, overly critical parents or teachers, being alienated or bullied and prolonged physical illness as a child.

Transition

This is a time of transition and change, you're shifting from adolescence to being an adult, from school to being a student, or maybe from studying into work. You'll probably be moving around a lot. You might move in to university residences, or live with friends for a while, or go travelling. It can be a very exciting time, but it can also be an unsettling one.

Becoming a Student

If you are a student who is feeling low, you are not alone. There has recently been an increase in



Some Signs of Depression

Symptoms may include:-

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feeling inadequate
- Anxiety
- Self-hatred
- Feeling negative about your life
- An inability to enjoy things that you used to like doing
- Feeling guilty or bad
- Feeling agitated
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Loss of energy or motivation
- Loss of sex drive
- Disturbed sleep
- Poor concentration
- Feeling unhappy, miserable and lonely a lot of the time
- Not looking after your personal appearance
- Frequent minor health problems, such as headaches or stomach-aches
- Not liking yourself, feeling ugly
- Feeling irritable or moody

If symptoms are present for more than two weeks and are affecting your life, contact one of the organisations listed on this factsheet or talk to your GP.

students using counselling and health services, and students are reporting greater symptoms of mental ill-health compared to non-students of the same age.² This could be because being a student brings money worries and exam stress. As a student you might be regularly travelling between your home and flat, and having to move every year. This can make it hard to access help when you need it.

Employment

Getting your first job is a huge event. However the path into employment can be uncertain and there is often not much guidance available. Finding your way in a new job can be a matter of trial and error. This is difficult to adjust to psychologically.

Relationships and Sexuality

Then there is falling in love, break-ups and becoming confident in your sexuality. Whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or straight it can take time to learn how to develop mature relationships and depression can affect your self-esteem and sex drive. Becoming a young parent is another life-changing experience, with post-natal depression more common in teenage mothers than older mothers.

Coping with depression

It is important that you get help as soon as possible. The column to the right has some tips on what to do if you, or someone you know, is showing signs of depression.



Things you can do

- Speak to someone you trust such as a friend, your parents, a tutor or someone at work.
- Get help now. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can be on the road to recovery.
- In depression, people often start thinking in a negative and unhelpful way. Try to identify and challenge these thoughts. Ask yourself, what would you tell a friend who thought that?
- Plan activities that you used to enjoy. Invite your friends to join you. Don't be too adventurous; but plan things that are manageable for you.
- It is common to have sleeping difficulties and it can be tempting to turn night into day. This can make things worse, so try to have regular sleeping and eating times, even if it is hard to sleep. Turn your mobile phone off and don't stay up late on the computer.
- If you are a student, many universities have a student counselling service that can provide you with confidential help.
- Learn to recognise your own successes. It can be easy to compare yourself with your friends and feel that what you are doing is not worth anything, but if you are coping with depression, everything is much harder and any achievement is worth noting.
- Pace yourself, take regular breaks and reward yourself with things you enjoy, like a trip to the cinema or lunch with a friend. You will find yourself to be more productive after a break.
- Join a self-help group run by Depression Alliance Scotland. Read self-help books and visit helpful websites (see below).

For Help and Support

- Depression Alliance Scotland 0845 123 23 20, info@dascot.org, www.dascot.org

Other Helplines

- SANEline and SANEmail 0845 767 8000, sanemail@sane.org.uk, www.sane.org.uk
- Samaritans 08457 909090 (24 hours), jo@samaritans.org.uk, www.samaritans.org.uk
- Breathing Space 0800 83 85 87 (6pm - 2am 365 days a year), www.breathingspace.co.uk
- Young Scot 0808 801 0338, info@youngscot.org, www.youngscot.org
- YoungMinds 020 7336 8445, enquiries@youngminds.org.uk, www.youngminds.org.uk

Online Resources

- Living Life to the Full Free web based life skills course. www.livinglifetothefull.com
- Depression in Teenagers Recognising and combating depression www.depressioninteenagers.co.uk
- Students against Depression Information for students tackling depression www.studentdepression.co.uk

1. The National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing: Action Plan 2003 - 2006

2. Association for University & College Counselling (AUCC) Annual Survey 2002/3