



**Depression in the Workplace**  
- A guide for employees



## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

The term depression is used to describe a wide range of moods and emotions. We all experience low spirits that are brought on from time to time, but depression describes a more severe problem that persists and interferes with everyday life.

There are a number of symptoms that are common to all types of depression. If you have depression you may experience low mood, loss of interest and ability to take pleasure in life, as well as feelings of worthlessness and guilt. You may also experience tearfulness, poor concentration, reduced energy, reduced or increased appetite and weight, sleep problems and anxiety. You may even feel that life is not worth living.

## CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

Depression can affect anyone, of any culture, age or background. In Ireland depression affects one in three people at some point in their lives and there are over an estimated 300,000 currently suffering from the condition nationwide. It is well recognised that depression, if left untreated, can be a factor in suicide.

Although in some instances depression may have no apparent cause, often it is related to upsetting life events, such as bereavement, relationship difficulties, physical illness, work or financial worries.

## SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

It is advisable to seek medical advice from a healthcare professional if five or more of the symptoms listed below are present for more than two weeks.

- Feeling depressed, sad, anxious or bored
- Lack of energy, always tired
- Difficulty sleeping, waking during the night or too early in the morning, oversleeping and trouble getting out of bed
- Poor concentration, forgetfulness or indecision
- Loss of interest in food, work or hobbies
- Headache, chest or other pains without a physical basis
- Reduced sense of self-worth or low self-esteem
- Thoughts of death or suicide



## TREATMENT OF DEPRESSION

Most individuals suffering from depression are successfully treated by their family doctor. A smaller number attend a psychiatrist and a few people with more severe forms of depression may require treatment in hospital.

Treatment for depression may involve psychotherapy, counselling, medicines or a combination of these treatments, depending on the cause, type and severity of the illness.

**PSYCHOTHERAPY** involves talking to a therapist about day-to-day relationships, how to change negative ways of thinking into positive thinking and how to change behaviour. Many people find psychotherapy useful in helping them to better understand their depression, how it affects them and what may be causing it.

**ANTIDEPRESSANT MEDICATIONS:** Low levels of the neurotransmitters such as serotonin, noradrenalin and dopamine have been implicated in depression. Antidepressant drugs re-balance the levels of neurotransmitters and relieve the symptoms of depression. This type of treatment can allow a person to feel better in themselves and get on with daily living.

There are several types of anti-depressant medication: tricyclic antidepressants (TCAs); selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), serotonin noradrenalin reuptake inhibitors (SNRI). Some people may need to try more than one antidepressant before they find one that works for them.

Drug treatment can take between two to four weeks to relieve symptoms of depression and are normally prescribed for six to nine months.

## MIND YOURSELF – ACHIEVING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

### WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

Often when we hear the term mental health, many of us think of mental illness. Mental health is far more than the absence of mental illness and has to do with many aspects of our lives including how we feel about ourselves and others, and how we are able to meet the demands of everyday life.

Coping with stress at work is one very important aspect of ensuring positive mental health. The key to positive mental health in the workplace lies in the following:

- Managing Your Workload
- Developing work skills
- Maintaining Physical Fitness

According to The Health and Safety Authority, health refers to both mental and physical health and employers and employees have duties to ensure that mental health at work is protected from harm, as far as is possible. This means work systems should be designed and operated so that people are not put in situations which are likely to damage their mental health and result in mental injury.



## DIET

What we eat affects our general health both physically and mentally. Ideally you should aim to eat a variety of food such as meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, and reduce alcohol consumption as it can hinder your ability to deal with problems.

## SLEEP

Sleep is essential for normal functioning and allows the body to repair itself both physically and mentally. Most adults need between seven to eight hours sleep each night.

## TALK TO SOMEONE

Talking to either friends or family is a good way to deal with problems you may have. For people with depression, talking to your GP, a counsellor, psychotherapist, your workplace occupational health professionals or employee assistance officers may also help you to better understand your depression, how it affects you and how you may deal with it more effectively.

## EXERCISE

Taking regular exercise can help to alleviate depression because of the release of chemicals by the body called endorphins which are mood elevating. Exercise can improve your self-esteem, build confidence and beat stress. It can also help combat some of the more physical aspects of depression such as sleep disturbance and tiredness, by boosting your energy levels.

People who are severely depressed may find it difficult to motivate themselves to take exercise and it is important if you feel like this to seek medical advice. However, after successful treatment, exercise can help keep depression at bay.

## RELAXATION

As life becomes busy and hectic, finding time to relax can sometimes be difficult. When you feel stressed or anxious try to think of situations where you felt calm. Relaxation can be a few moments of quietness or simply enjoying a hobby or interest, but whatever it is try to take at least 20 minutes a day for relaxation. Meditation or yoga can also enhance relaxation.

Take time out to laugh and have fun with family and friends. The process of laughter can have huge psychological benefits that provide positive mental health and physical health improvements. Laughter serves as a release mechanism for negative emotions such as anger, sadness and fear and research has shown that laughter can serve to reduce stress long after the laughter has ended.

## WORK LIFE BALANCE

Trying to balance both professional and personal commitments can often be a delicate juggling act. Everybody's personal situation is different, therefore there is no perfect balance you should be striving for, but one that is right for you.

There are steps you can follow to help you achieve your personal work life balance:

**Slow Down.** Life is simply too short, so don't let things pass you in a blur. Take steps to stop and enjoy the things and people around you. Schedule more time between meetings; don't make plans for every evening or weekend, and find some ways to distance yourself from the things that are causing you the most stress.

**Learn to Better Manage Your Time.** Avoid procrastination. For many people, most of the stress they feel comes from being disorganised - and putting things on the long finger. Learn to set more realistic goals and deadlines — and then stick to them. You'll find that not only are you less stressed, but your work will be better too.

**Share the Load.** Even though we may sometimes feel we're the only ones capable of doing something, it's usually not the case. Get your partner or other family members to help you with all your personal or family responsibilities.

**Don't sweat the small stuff.** It's more easily said than done, but learn to let things go once in a while. Learn to recognise those things that don't have much impact in your life and allow yourself to let them go.

**Explore Your Options.** Get help. If you are feeling overwhelmed with your responsibilities, try to get help. In many cases, you have options, but you need to take the time to find them.

**Take Charge.** Set priorities. Sometimes it's easier for us to allow ourselves to feel overwhelmed rather than taking charge and developing a prioritised list of things that need to get done. Develop a list. Set priorities. And then enjoy the satisfaction of crossing things off your list.

**Simplify.** It seems human nature for just about everyone to take on too many tasks and responsibilities. Find a way to simplify your life by changing your lifestyle.

## EMPLOYEES SICK LEAVE ENTITLEMENTS

Some people find they have to take some time off work as a result of their depression. It is at the discretion of your employer to decide his/her own policy on sick pay and sick leave. If it is necessary to take time off, check your contract or terms of employment, speak to your employer, or contact the Department of Social and Family Affairs for your full list of entitlements.



*"...talking to your GP, a counsellor, psychotherapist, your workplace occupational health professionals or employee assistance officers may also help you to better understand your depression..."*

## RECOMMENDED READING

**(2007) Flagging The Problem: A New Approach To Mental Health**  
**Barry, Harry Dr.**

Flagging the Problem uses a brand new way of identifying and dealing with mental health problems using colour coded flags by a medical doctor with extensive experience and interest in the treatment of people with mental health issues.

**(1999) Depression, The Common Sense Approach.**  
**Bates, Tony Dr.**

Dr. Tony Bates, Senior Clinical Psychologist at St. James's Hospital, Dublin, has written a clear and accessible book on depression. He examines depression as a development of low self esteem and emphasises the need to counter the self defeating thoughts and behaviour that results in depression. He shows you how you can regain trust in yourself which gets lost in depression. Dr. Bates also gives helpful advice to partners and families who live with a depressed person.

**From the Heart - Your Mental Health Questions Answered.**  
**Casey, Patricia Prof.**

This book will prove an invaluable resource for people seeking knowledge and advice on a wide range of mental health and emotional problems. There are numerous suggestions for further reading, websites and contacts for support organisations.

**(1991) Postnatal Depression A Guide For Mothers And Families.** **Aware Publications.**  
**Corry, Martina Dr.**

Dr. Corry, Director of a postnatal depression unit, lucidly explains baby blues, postnatal depression and puerperal psychosis and how they are treated. She also gives useful self-help advice and guidelines for family members.

**(1997) I Don't Want to Talk About It. Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression.**  
**Real, Terence.**

Exploring how men with depression need to change their quest in life in order to tackle and overcome the barriers surrounding their condition.

## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

### **Aware**

72 Lower Leeson Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 661 7211  
1890 303 302  
[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

### **Citizens Information Board**

7th Floor  
Hume House  
Ballsbridge  
Dublin 4  
Tel: 01 605 9000  
[www.citizensinformation.ie](http://www.citizensinformation.ie)

### **Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment**

23 Kildare Street  
Dublin 2  
Tel: 01 631 2121  
[www.entemp.ie](http://www.entemp.ie)

### **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

Áras Mhic Dhiarmada  
Store Street,  
Dublin 1  
Tel: 1890 66 22 44  
[www.welfare.ie](http://www.welfare.ie)

### **Mental Health Ireland**

Mensana House  
6 Adelaide Street  
Dun Laoghaire  
Co Dublin  
Tel: 01 284 1166  
[www.mentalhealthireland.ie](http://www.mentalhealthireland.ie)

### **Samaritans**

112 Marlborough Street  
Dublin 1  
Tel: 01 8727700  
Helpline 1850 60 90 90  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

### **References:**

[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

"Understanding depression in the workplace - how can you help?"

Flagging the Problem: A New Approach to Mental Health,  
Dr Harry Barry

Citizens Information Centre

