



Oxford Health
NHS Foundation Trust

Psychosocial Response Group

Coping with the Coronavirus

Introduction

This leaflet is one of a series about Coronavirus and mental health. The leaflets contain information about how the Coronavirus outbreak might affect your mental health, how to look after yourself, what to do if a problem persists, and where to find further information.

Coronavirus key facts:

- This is a widespread outbreak, not limited to one area
- It can occur at any time rather than being concentrated in wintertime
- For some people who are older and have pre-existing physical health conditions It is likely to be more severe, and may even be fatal, whereas for others it may be a relatively mild condition.

Whilst all of us are familiar with challenges in life, the Coronavirus and its consequences is a particularly difficult and stressful experience for everyone. Some people may have to cope with being unwell, looking after family members or dealing with loss and bereavement. Coming to terms with the consequences that the Coronavirus has had for you and those close to you can take some time. This leaflet focuses on coping with depression; others cover bereavement, fatigue, recovering from trauma, and coping with worry and uncertainty.

What is depression?

You might experience times when you feel upset or low in mood. Such feelings are understandable when you must deal with a lot of things at once. These feelings are part of a normal reaction to loss or stressful events and should resolve in time. The ability to deal with these feelings is often made easier by talking to someone close to you about how you are feeling.

However, for some, low mood can become more severe and difficult to shake off. When low mood persists in this way, it is referred to as 'clinical depression'. Clinical depression (or simply depression) is a common problem, it is estimated that as many as 1 in 6 will experience depression at some point in their lives. Below are some of the common signs and symptoms you may experience if you are depressed:

Emotions or feelings

- Feeling sad, numb, guilty, upset, hopeless or angry
- Crying a lot, or feeling unable to cry
- Anxiety and fear
- Loss of interest and enjoyment
- Feeling alone, becoming isolated and withdrawn

Physical and bodily signs

- Tiredness or exhaustion
- Restlessness
- Changes in sleep – waking early or interrupted sleep
- Changes to appetite, eating and weight
- Poor memory and concentration
- Worsening of chronic conditions

Thoughts

- Having upsetting and gloomy thoughts, generally expecting the worst
- Thinking that everything is hopeless
- Losing confidence in yourself
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Thoughts of death and suicide

Changes in Behaviour

- Finding it difficult to be with people
- Reduced activities
- Self neglect

Some of these symptoms, such as feeling tired, aches and pains, or changes to sleep and appetite, may be like those caused by the Coronavirus or side effects of treatment. If you can talk through your feelings with a medical professional via NHS 111, they can help decide whether it is your physical illness or depression that is making you feel as you do.

People's experience of depression varies, and with it the extent to which

they experience it. Not everyone experiences all these symptoms or with the same severity. The length of time people experience depression also tends to vary, although most people feel better again within 4 to 6 months.

What causes depression?

Depression can be triggered by a range of things, including biological and psychological factors. For example, someone may be born with an inherited tendency to depression, but they may not actually become depressed until they experience an upsetting event. The Coronavirus, and the difficulties and stresses that go with it, is likely to provide a variety of triggers for depression. For example, isolation through quarantine, bereavement, physical illness, a change in roles and responsibilities, worry and uncertainty could all trigger depression.

You are more likely to experience depression when you are physically unwell if:

- You have been depressed before.
- You do not have family or friends you can talk to about your illness.
- You have other problems or stresses going on in your life.
- You are in considerable pain.
- Your illness prevents you from looking after yourself

How can you make yourself feel better?

Talk to others, tell others how you are feeling. You do not have to see them in person, you can use online platforms or phone if necessary.

Help yourself through activity

You may find yourself becoming less active, or avoid certain activities possibly because you feel tired and do not have the energy and motivation to do things you used to do. Being quarantined at home may mean that you have to find new ways of being active; by picking up old hobbies for example.

One way to overcome depression is by increasing and/or modifying your daily activity, so that you increase things which you enjoy or which make

you feel worthwhile. You can start by keeping a daily record of exactly how you are spending your time. Rate each activity from 0 to 10 according to how much pleasure or sense of achievement you get from it. After a period of at least a week, look back to pinpoint the activities that you enjoyed, and those that gave you a greater sense of achievement. You should then begin to plan more activities that give you a sense of pleasure and achievement.

Identify and evaluate negative thoughts

Negative thoughts are central to what keeps you depressed. Some people find distraction useful, so when a negative thought pops into your head, distract yourself from the thought by doing something that keeps your mind busy. Distraction is often used as a short-term coping strategy. In the long-term, you need to find other ways of managing your negative thoughts. One way to do this is to test the truth of your negative thoughts by examining all the evidence that supports or does not support each of your thoughts. Taking into account this evidence will allow you to develop a more balanced alternative thought. It may be helpful to ask yourself how you would have viewed this situation before you became ill, or what someone else might think in this situation?

Problem solving

Problem solving is a useful way of tackling practical problems. Identify the problem you want to work on, and then think of as many solutions as possible. Choose the one that seems to be the best, and then work on putting this into action. Once you start, you will need to review your progress and possibly modify the solution.

Look after yourself

Resist the temptation to cope with your depression by using alcohol or other substances. In the short-term this may give you some relief, but in the long-term this can lead to other health and psychological difficulties. Trying to eat as healthily as you can can help to keep you in good health

and can aid recovery.

When should you seek professional help?

If your feelings of depression:

- Don't seem to be getting better with time.
- Begin to affect your feelings towards family and friends, your work and your interests.
- If you feel that life is not worth living, or that other people would be better off without you.

If you are worried by any of the above phone the Samaritans on 116 123, NHS 111 or your GP practice.

Key Points

Please contact us if you would like the information in another language or different format.

Arabic يُرجى الاتصال بنا إذا كنتم ترغبون في الحصول على المعلومات بلغة أخرى أو بتنسيق مختلف.

Bengali আপনি এই তথ্য অন্য ভাষায় বা আলাদা আকারে পেতে চাইলে অনুগ্রহ করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।
Urdu اگر آپ یہ معلومات دیگر زبان یا مختلف فارمیٹ میں چاہتے ہیں تو برائے مہربانی ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Chinese 若要以其他語言或格式提供這些資訊，請與我們聯繫

Polish Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku lub w innym formacie, skontaktuj się z nami.

Portuguese Queira contactar-nos se pretender as informações noutro idioma ou num formato diferente.

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