

## **Treatment for Mild Depression**

Treatment recommendations differ between mild, moderate and severe depression

Mild depression is defined by presence of two of the triad of low mood, loss of interest and reduced energy and two other symptoms over at least two weeks. (PHQ scores of 5- 9)

**Mild depression** should be treated by education and watchful waiting. Non-drug strategies are to be preferred to drug treatment.

### **Watchful Waiting**

In mild depression a period of watchful waiting is recommended. Regular appointments at two weekly intervals with the same GP will allow for progress or deterioration to be monitored. PHQ-9 can be readministered.

### **Psychosocial Support and Education**

GPs should be confident of the proven efficacy of GP support and counselling and be positive about the benefits of giving time to depressed patients.

The high proportion of patients presenting with somatic symptoms means that often GPs will spend time excluding physical conditions, thereby gaining the patient's trust and increasing understanding of their depression.

Patients may benefit from information on the nature of depression. Discussion between doctor and patient can help ensure a shared view of the illness. Talking to patients in terms of depression altering their thinking, feelings and behaviour as well as having physical effects can help clarify the nature of their difficulties (see Williams, 2001).

Patient education leaflets can be found at  
[http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/patient\\_information/PILS](http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/patient_information/PILS)

Listening is essential since often the problems cannot be solved, but talking about them may bring relief. It may be useful for people to have access to a confidential help line outside of surgery hours. Breathing Space provides such a service.

In depression people often overlook potential solutions to life difficulties. Simple problem solving techniques can often be used to support the patient. This involves the patient in their own management and encourages them to set an agenda determined by their own priorities.

Self help web sites for people with mild depression/depressive symptoms can be found at  
<http://www.livinglifetothefull.com>  
<http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au>

Guided self help workers will now see clients with a PHQ9 score of 14 and below, but with the clinician retaining clinical judgement about the referral.

Reduced activity rates often result in people losing sources of pleasure and social contact. Discussion of ways to re introduce such stimulation can be helpful, as can ideas on reorganising work commitments and obligations in order to adjust to lowered capacity for decision making and activity.

Exercise has been shown to be beneficial for low mood. GPs can discuss exercise with patients and encourage them to take up a regular programme suited to their needs.

Unhelpful behaviours, such as drinking too much or excessive spending, may develop in an attempt to alter mood. A check for the presence of such maladaptive self “help” strategies may help prevent their escalation and reduce secondary life difficulties developing.

Poor sleep can compound depression and difficulty in coping. Sleep hygiene should be checked and advice on good sleep habits be given.

A useful patient leaflet “**Insomnia (Poor Sleep)**” is available On-line at: -  
[http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/patient\\_information/PILS](http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/patient_information/PILS)

## **Mood Gym**

MoodGYM is a free, interactive internet-based program designed to prevent and decrease symptoms of depression.

MoodGYM aims to teach you how you can feel less stressed, depressed and anxious, and better able to cope with your life.

From MoodGYM we hope you will learn helpful ways of thinking about problems, how to improve your self-esteem, and how best to relate to others (and to be more assertive). You will also learn how to increase the pleasure in your life, how to relax and how to cope with a relationship break-up.

MoodGYM consists of a number of interactive modules. These should be completed in order, as each module builds upon material covered in earlier modules. As you move through the program, you will be presented with information, animated demonstrations, quizzes and ‘homework’ exercises.

Your answers to the exercises are recorded in your own personal MoodGYM Workbook.

The Workbook is important as it helps you track your progress as you move through the modules.

Think of MoodGYM as an interactive self-help book. There are many books about how to improve your mental health.

The advantage of MoodGYM is that it can give you feedback about your mental health, and you can use the online exercise to work out how to handle life’s challenges better.

Moodgym is located at <http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au>

## Living Life to the Full

Living Life to The Full On-line is a new life skills resource. The course has been written by a psychiatrist who has many years of experience using a Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) approach and also in helping people use these skills in everyday life. During the development phase of the course, a wide range of health care practitioners and members of the public have used each module. Joining and using the site is entirely free.

The Living Life to The Full modules have been devised to help people develop key life skills to help them tackle common problems we all face from time to time in life.

The modules act as a free and stand-alone resources to be worked through at home in the person's own time. They may sometimes be supported by sessions with a health care practitioner. The materials use modern educational techniques and the evidence-based cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) approach to help bring about helpful change.

Living Life to The Full On-Line can be found at: -  
<http://www.livinglifetothefull.com/elearning/>

## Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone line you can call when you're feeling down. You might be worried about something – money, work, relationships, and exams – or maybe you're just feeling fed up and can't put your finger on why.

Sharing your feelings with your friends or talking with your family can be difficult – pretending everything is okay seems by far the easiest way to deal with things. Maybe you're afraid to let down your guard and tell those close to you what's really on your mind – you don't want to worry them, or perhaps you just don't know how to explain the way you are feeling.

That's when you might want to talk to the people at Breathing Space. They're available to listen to you when you're feeling low. They can offer advice, or suggest people who can help you with more specific problems.

There are people at Breathing Space to listen to you every night from 6pm-2am, when you're wide awake and running over problems in your mind.

The service is completely confidential and it's a free phone number – 0800 83 85 87 (Minicom: 0800 31 71 60) – so it won't show up in your phone bills\*.

So the next time you're feeling down, it might help to get some Breathing Space.

\*If you're calling from a mobile, check out what you have with them – they might charge you for your call.

<http://www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk>

## Samaritans

Samaritans is available 24 hours a day to provide confidential emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.

In the UK dial **08457 90 90 90**, for the cost of a local call.

<http://www.samaritans.org>