

A few notes and thoughts on depression. (From a thread on my Facebook page)

Depression is one of the biggest problems in Ireland and it's growing.

The most important thing to say about depression is it is temporary. There have been over 100,000 studies into depression and the results show that depression can be lifted and kept away.

During your life there is a 1 in 10 chance of developing depression if you're a man.
If you are a woman, the chance is a startling 1 in 4 chance.

Depression is linked to modern life changes. In the 12 years from 1988 to 2000 the rates of depression doubled!

Think about that for a moment. There is a silver lining to that piece of information. Our genetics didn't radically change in 12 years, but our environment did and our way of life did. These are things you can control.

If you're feeling low in mood and down, you should be aware that you can feel better.

There are two common signs of depression that when spotted, can help you reverse it. They are: excessive sleep, and less engagement with the world.

If your world is shrinking, if you have stopped doing things and going places you used to enjoy and are feeling down, you can create a positive change by re-engaging in those activities, even if that may be hard initially. Face to face social contact is an enormous help.

If you are sleeping lots, the reason that you feel so exhausted may be that your mind is producing too much REM sleep. There is good evidence that excessive 'Dream State' sleep makes depression worse and leads to exhaustion. Getting up after a normal night's sleep and doing anything that keeps you active is good.

The single biggest thing you can do if you're feeling down is to do light exercise most days. 30 minutes walking or swimming 5 days a week will make a huge difference on your brain and is proven to lift over 1/3 of depressions.

I'll post more on what you can do to help someone you feel may be suffering a depressive episode soon. The main things to look for are people isolating themselves, withdrawing from past activities, and excessive sleep. These are the easy parts to see.

There are a few rules of thumb for both getting yourself out of depression, and for helping others.

Stop going over the past! Beating yourself up over old stuff is no help. Try and find something you enjoy and look forward to. Even a comedy on YouTube is a good start. Changing the feeling from being 'down' to laughter has a huge impact on your brain chemistry.

If you're seeking professional help, find someone who focuses on the future not just talking over the past. The past should only be looked at if some traumatic element needs to be resolved. Any therapy engaged in for that, needs to be resolution focused, not just talking about it.

The American Psychiatric Association has even been sued because one of their members raked over the past with a depressed person. It is contra-indicated as it makes things worse. Only therapies of resolution are appropriate and then only for specific traumatic/upsetting issues.

If you're trying to help someone, be there for them to talk to. Don't ask why they're depressed, don't tell them to 'cop on', or 'get over it'. There is lots you can do. Try to get them active, get them talking to other people. Find out what they enjoy doing and help them do it. Find a DVD that makes them laugh and smile, take them out swimming, take a walk with them, help them with a morning activity to keep the lure of sleep away etc.

Lastly, be patient, build success one step in the right direction at a time.

The good news is: research shows that 50% of depression lifts in six months, and 75% lifts in 1 year. In most cases the mind can correct the depression by itself. But it can lift far quicker with support, either therapy or the sort of support I've mentioned in the past few day's posts. If depression is longer lasting, I strongly recommend getting appropriate therapy that is future focused.

Depression can result from many causes, usually involving a sense of loss. That could be a death, loss of job, end of relationship, etc. Loss of status is the number 1 trigger for suicide in men, and relationship issues is the number 1 cause of suicide in women.

However it's not the loss that leads to suicide, it is consistently shown to be a sense of hopelessness that triggers suicide, and it's easier to lose hope when isolated.

One of the big dangers is that people suffering depression can pass unnoticed. It is isolating and that is a danger. If you suspect someone is depressed, if they are pulling away from life and becoming isolated please talk to them. Don't be afraid of getting involved. You could be the person who saves a life by doing so.