Depression

We often use the expression ‘I feel depressed’ when we’re feeling sad or miserable about life. Usually, these feelings pass in due course. But, if the feelings are interfering with your life and don't go away after a couple of weeks, or if they come back, over and over again, for a few days at a time, it could be a sign that you're depressed in the medical sense of the term.

In its mildest form, *depression* can mean just being in low spirits. It doesn’t stop you leading your normal life, but makes everything harder to do and seem less worthwhile. At its most severe, major depression (clinical depression) can be life-threatening, because it can make you feel suicidal or simply give up the will to live.

Depression presents itself in many different ways. You may not realise what's going on, because sometimes your problems seem to be physical, rather than mental or emotional. People who are depressed often have anxiety as well – the two problems often occur together, and each can make the other worse.

If you are feeling anxious, your mind may be full of busy, repetitive thoughts, which make it hard to concentrate, relax, or sleep. You may have physical symptoms, such as headaches, aching muscles, sweating and dizziness. Anxiety may cause physical exhaustion and general ill health

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) guidelines on the treatment of depression recommend: cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), including mindfulness-based cognitive therapy and behavioural activation.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) helps to identify and change negative thoughts and feelings affecting your behaviour and, although often a short-term treatment, may last up to 12 months. For mild depression you may be offered computerised CBT, which uses a programme you can follow either by yourself or in addition to sessions with a therapist.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is an approach to wellbeing that involves accepting life, and living and paying attention to the present moment. It includes taking time to see what is happening around you in a non-judgmental way, rather than going over your problems again and again. Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is usually done in groups.

Behavioural activation makes you look at the simple everyday tasks you may be avoiding and start doing them. For example, you may have felt too depressed to do the washing up and let it pile up in the kitchen. The bigger the pile, the less you feel like doing it.

Behavioural activation would encourage you to tackle it, even if you start by only doing some of it. As you do it, the dishes get clean, your kitchen gets tidier, and you feel a bit better about everything. On your own, this can feel like an uphill struggle, but with the support of a CBT therapist and with the perspective and skills gained within the therapy, it becomes very much more possible.