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Zara qualified as a Veterinary Nurse in 2009 at a first opinion practice in the UK before moving onto referral work in Ophthalmology. During her six years in Ophthalmology she achieved her Nurses Certificate in Anaesthesia and Critical Care. Zara went on and joined Lumbry Park Veterinary Specialists as a member of the Theatre team in 2015. While on maternity leave Zara gained a Level 2 Certificate in awareness of mental health problems and a Level 2 Certificate in understanding mental health first aid and mental health advocacy in the workplace.

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Depression, hidden behind the smile

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ABSTRACT: Unfortunately, in this day and age, some people still think that depression is trivial and not a genuine condition. Current research suggests that depression develops from a combination of physiological, genetic, environmental and biological factors. With the right treatment and support the majority of people who suffer with depression can either make a full recovery or find coping mechanisms to help them manage their condition.

KEYWORDS: Depression; support for mental health; causes of depression

Introduction

According to @NHS, 'Some people think depression is trivial and not a genuine health condition.' They are wrong. Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders where research suggests that depression develops from a combination of physiological, genetic, environmental and biological factors.

Many successful and famous people, including Winston Churchill and JK Rowling, have suffered from depression, and research carried out by BUPA suggests that over half of business leaders have experienced depression at some point in their lives. So, if you too suffer from depression, you are in good company (Vetlife, 2021).

Between one in four adults of the population experience a mental health condition with depression being one of the most prevalent in any given year (CQC, 2020).

The good news is that with the right treatment and support, most people suffering with depression can make a full recovery.

What is depression?

The term depression is commonly used to describe short term feelings of sadness whilst clinical depression will last for more than two weeks. These feelings may negatively impact on physical, mental and emotional wellbeing which potentially affects both personal and working relationships (NIMH, 2021).

What is the difference between feeling low and depression?

Most people will experience ups and downs in their life, causing an individual to feel unhappy or low in mood. This is absolutely normal in life. These kinds of feelings of sadness, frustration or stress will pass or lessen over time by making small changes in their life e.g., resolving a difficult situation or getting more sleep.

A low mood that does not go away, may be a sign of clinical depression.

Depression involves more than just a feeling of unhappiness. Clinical depression is an illness that involves both the individual's body and mind with the inability to shake off the feelings of sadness, lasting more than two weeks (NIMH, 2021).

Depression can cause the individual to struggle to function on a daily basis, while in more severe cases the individual may even feel like life is not worth living.

If clinical depression is not treated, it will progressively get worse and can last for years.

Signs and symptoms of depression

Table 1 shows the common symptoms that may manifest themselves when in a depressed state.

Table 1. Signs and symptoms of depression.

Symptoms	Physical symptoms	Social symptoms
• Continuous low mood or sadness	• Disturbed sleep	• Neglecting hobbies or interests
• Feeling hopeless and helpless	• Low sex drive (loss of libido)	• Avoiding contact with friends and family
• Feeling anxious or worried	• Lack of energy	• Avoiding social gatherings
• Feeling tearful	• Changes to menstrual cycle	• Having difficulties within the family or work environment
• Having low self-esteem	• Moving or speaking more slowly than usual	
• Finding it difficult to make decisions	• Constipation	
• Feeling guilt-ridden	• Unexplained aches or pains	
• Having no motivation or interest in things	• Changes in appetite or weight	
• Feeling irritable and intolerant of others		
• Not getting any enjoyment out of life		
• Having suicidal thoughts or thoughts of causing harm to yourself		

What are the causes of depression?

Depression can vary a lot between different people. For some people a combination of different factors may cause their depression while some suffer without any obvious reason.

Depression can occur as a result of disappointment, frustration or a loss but there is often more than one reason that is the cause, these will be different for each individual.

These may include:

- There is good evidence to show that going through difficult experiences during childhood can make an individual more vulnerable to experiencing depression later in life (Mind, 2021).
- If an individual experiences/suffers from another mental health problem (anxiety/eating disorder/post-traumatic stress disorder), it is common to experience depression as well.
- Depression can run in the family and can increase the chances of developing the illness.
- Some individuals are more vulnerable to depression than others due to their particular personality.
- Individuals that are physically run down, stressed, live alone or have no friends are more likely to develop depression.
- Some people are unable to come to terms with an event that has happened in their lives, such as bereavement, divorce or losing their job.
- There are some people who use alcohol or drugs to cope with their situation, which can result in a spiral of depression. Alcohol is known as a 'depressant'

Relationship problems – all relationships and families go through difficult times and experiencing occasional problems and conflict is normal. However, sometimes these problems can become overwhelming.

Occupational problems – at times people can feel under pressure at work which can lead to stress and anxiety. Prolonged stress can become more serious and make existing mental health problems worse (e.g., depression).

Social and economic circumstances – depression is more common in people who live in difficult social and economic circumstances. Most of us will have money worries at some point in our lives and perhaps struggle to pay bills or look after their family. While some of us can cope, for others it can become a real burden and can seriously impact their everyday lives.

Loss and bereavement – commonly associated with death, but for others it can occur after life-changing circumstances such as divorce/separation, redundancy/unemployment, deteriorating health or loss of contact within a family or friendship.

Figure 1. Contributing factors to maintaining depression status.

Table 2. Useful contacts.

Organisation	Contact telephone number	Online contact details
Depression UK		http://depressionuk.org/ (email contact: info@depressionuk.org)
Sane	07984 967 708	http://www.sane.org.uk/
Campaign against living miserably (CALM)	0800 585858	https://www.thecalmzone.net/
Vetlife health support	03030 402551	https://www.vetlife.org.uk/how-we-help/vetlife-health-support/
Samaritans	116 123	https://www.samaritans.org/
MIND	0300 123 3393	https://www.mind.org.uk/
Rethink	0808 801 0525	https://www.rethink.org/
Anxiety UK	0344 775 774	https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/

and can actually make the depression worse.

- Having a physical illness can affect the way the brain works, leading to depression. These can include the following:
 - Hormonal problems such as hypothyroidism (under active thyroid).
 - Long/painful illnesses, such as arthritis.
 - Viral infections like the flu/glandular fever (especially in younger people).
 - Life-threatening illnesses like cancer and heart disease.
- Everyday life can be very stressful. Even under the best conditions, daily life can become difficult and exhausting. A person with depression may feel that they cannot move through or get on with normal, everyday activities/experiences, making the recovery from depression even more difficult.

Some of the demands in daily life that can contribute to a person maintaining their depression are listed in Figure 1.

Local resources and treatments that are available to support a person experiencing depression

Every person will respond to treatment in different ways. Treatment for depression will usually involve a combination of medication and talking therapies/self-help.

GPs may suggest a waiting for two weeks known as the 'waiting period, to see if the depression improves and will generally review the situation to see if further

intervention is required. The type of intervention will depend on personal preferences as well as the severity of the depression. Meditation can be prescribed whilst other interventions are attempted.

Mood diaries can often help people identify triggers or activities, people or places that make them feel better. Mindfulness can help people to focus on the moment within their mind, body and surroundings. With spending time in nature and exercise helping improve a lot of people's mood. From four studies, the NHS found the odds of developing depression were 22% lower for people who managed 150 min of moderate to vigorous physical activity a week compared with those who did not (NHS, 2021a).

Self-help groups are available for people who find that talking about their feelings helpful with either friends/family or complete strangers.

The NHS have developed a number of online tools such as a depression self-assessment tool (NHS, 2021b) and a variety of apps that can support people using breathing exercises or positive mindset games (NHS, 2021c).

Useful contacts

There are a number of organisations that can offer advice (Table 2).

Conclusion

Mental health problems can range from the worries we all experience as part of everyday life to serious long-term conditions. The majority of people who experience mental health problems can recover from them or

learn to live with their condition. With the raising awareness of mental illness in recent years, the stigma is being challenged and social attitudes to mental illness are changing. People are becoming more accepting of mental illness as a difference rather than a problem.

If you experience symptoms of depression for most of the day for more than two weeks, have no shame and seek help from a GP.

Sometimes it can be difficult to imagine that treatment can actually help, but the sooner you seek help and receive treatment, the sooner your depression will improve.

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