

StChristopher's

Coping with feelings of depression

**INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS,
CARERS AND FAMILIES**

1 Coping with feelings of depression

There is no right or wrong way to feel when you or someone close to you has a terminal illness. You may experience a range of emotions, at different times. You may feel shock, fear, anger and resentment. Or you may feel helpless, sad, frustrated or perhaps experience relief and acceptance. You may also feel isolated and alone, even if you have family and friends around you.

These feelings may be profound, persistent and feel overwhelming at times but they are understandable. Whatever is going on for you, we can support you through.

At times it can be most helpful to allow yourself to stay with these feelings and we can simply be alongside you in that. Our social workers can offer emotional support and help you find ways of coping. Or you may want to talk to someone from our spiritual care team. It is also important to recognise that there are a number of therapeutic approaches, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), art or music therapy which can make a difference. Some persistent and severe changes in mood which make you unable to participate in everyday life and pleasures can be treated, including with medication.

Because there is an expectation that people with an illness or their carers will experience some of the feelings above it can be easy to assume that there is nothing that will change this. We would encourage you to talk to us about what you are going through even if you do not particularly feel like it or expect anything to help. People close to you may be dealing with their own

feelings and it may therefore be useful to speak with someone less close to you, such as your nurse or social worker. Between us we can then explore what support might be most helpful for you.

2 When low feelings persist

Sometimes things can feel very bleak indeed and you may feel suicidal. Depression can pass. Suicidal feelings can also pass. We have experience in helping you get through and make sense of what you are feeling. We will take you seriously whatever you tell us. Please talk to us.

3 Some advice for coping with feelings of depression

The following is some advice for coping with depression based on CBT thinking. Regardless of whether you are familiar with this approach here are some practical, common sense suggestions to consider.

Thoughts and their impact on feelings

The following thoughts may be familiar to you and can be a sign of depression:

- ‘I can’t concentrate.’
- ‘I can’t be bothered to do anything. I just want to sleep.’
- ‘I just want to be left alone. I’ve stopped going out.’
- ‘There’s no point in doing anything.’
- ‘No one will love or care for me now that I’m ill.’

These sorts of thoughts make unhelpful feelings worse. When you feel really down,

low mood can often make you withdraw from company or conversation. Instead you may be going over and over thoughts such as the above, making you feel worse and creating a vicious circle in which unhelpful thoughts feed into each other. Such thoughts can feel very real and difficult to shake off. Thoughts such as 'No one will love me now' are rarely accurate or factual. Even when bad things are happening, your thoughts may be focused only on the worst outcome. Such thoughts will then affect the way you feel.

How you can help yourself if you are feeling low or depressed

Share your thoughts and talk to someone, even if you feel it is hopeless and there is nothing people can do. Don't wait or expect to snap out of it; ask for help.

Just doing something, however small, can help to break the pattern of thoughts and make you feel better, even though it may be the last thing you feel like doing. Increasing some manageable activities like getting dressed, taking a walk to the shops, if you can, seeing a friend or listening to music can help. Increasing activity and exercise levels by even a small amount can have a big impact on mood, as it stimulates the body to produce its natural antidepressants.

It may help to know that people who attend the Anniversary Centre and Caritas Centre are often going through similar experiences and gain enormous support simply from being with each other or taking part in activities together.

Research suggests that doing something enjoyable and gaining a sense of achievement

improves mood. 'Doing' can be a powerful antidepressant, so choose activities which are important to you, or give you a feeling of purpose.

4 Things to remember when exercising

If you are exercising remember:

- to plan rest periods so that you don't get too tired
- to keep your goals realistic and set achievable limits, e.g. aim to walk for five minutes initially rather than ten and plan to build up activity over time
- to try measuring your mood on a scale of 0 to 10 before, during and after an activity so you can find out which activities lift your mood most effectively and plan to do them more often, if possible
- not to expect instant results if you have been feeling very low for a while.

5 Other sources of support

Both the services below are available 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

Silver Line

0800 328 8888

A free helpline for older people, offering phone support and befriending.

Samaritans

08457 90 90 90

Providing emotional support for people who are experiencing feelings of emotional distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.

It is really important for your care that the information you give us is as full and accurate as possible.

If you would like this information in a different format, such as audio tape, braille or large print, or in another language, please speak to the Communications Team on **020 8768 4500** or email **communications@stchristophers.org.uk**

StChristopher's

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