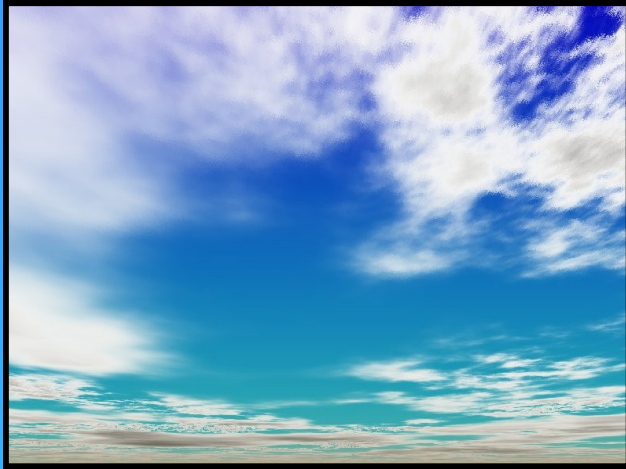


# **Self Help Guide to cope with Stress and Low Mood**



University life and all its new freedoms is very exciting but student life is also a major change in life and it can be very stressful.

First time away from home, cultural and lifestyle changes, academic pressure, flat issues, financial difficulties, health problems and other personal worries may make your new life full of unpleasant challenges to face.

If you find yourself stressed or feeling down don't think you are the only one. One in four people experience a mental health problem at some point in their life.

This booklet provides guidelines to better understand stress and depression and tips on how to cope with it



# 1. Stress

## 1.1 What is stress?

Stress describes the way you feel when you are facing too much pressure in your life. Pressure is natural and can have a positive impact and make you feeling well as it makes you more alert and keeps you motivated but too much pressure leads to stress and can cause illness and physical problems.

Nowadays, life is becoming more and more stressful. It is very common to be stressed but some people suffer more from stress. If you find out you are stressed, don't panic. There are ways to cope with it!

## 1.2 What causes stress?

### LIFE EVENTS

Serious ill-health      Death of a loved one      Loss/change of job

Divorce, separation or relationship break up

Problems with accommodation or moving out

### DAY TO DAY HASSLE

Financial worries  
and debts

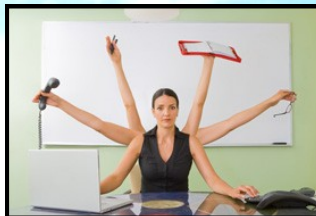
Noise and pollution

Academic pressure

Work pressure

Unpleasant relationships

Loneliness



Uninteresting job

Too many things to do/ no time for yourself

## TRAUMA

Car and other accidents

Violence

Sexual or domestic abuse

Victim of crime

### 1.3 Recognizing stress

Overwhelmed with issues as opposite to dealing with them, it is not always easy to realize you are suffering from stress.

Stress impacts on your physical and mental health and on your life style

## PHYSICAL SIGNS

Headaches

Tendency to sweat

Back pain

Chest pain

Stomach and bowel problems

Cramps or muscle spasms

Feeling dizzy or sick

Heart palpitation

## TENSION

Irritable,

Fear,

Anger,

Frustration

Tearful,

Aggressive



## BLUES

Low Mood

Lack of sleep

Loss of confidence

Lack of energy

Constant tiredness

Frequent crying

# EFFECTS ON YOUR LIFE

Loss of interest in usual activities

Eating more or lack of appetite

Not motivated to see people or to get things done

Find it hard to concentrate

Tending to panic in social situations or in crowds

Drinking or smoking more

If you have some of these signs, it may be you are facing stress. Don't leave physical symptoms persisting as it is a more serious sign of stress.

Avoiding dealing with stress is not a solution as it may become much worse.

## 1.4 Tips do deal with stress

### ☛ Tackle what causes stress

The first step to deal with stress is to be aware it is problem for you. Identify what causes you stress and take steps to tackle it:

- Write down things in life that cause you stress
- Find ways to solve issues and/or to reduce your stress
- Make an action plan to help you to get better without changing too many things at once. Set priorities and do one thing at a time!
- Be realistic of what you can achieve. Don't take too much on and learn to say no
- Concentrate on the present
- Talk to a friend or relative you trust to share your feelings



### ☛ Eating well:

A healthy diet helps to keep good physical and mental health

- Don't miss breakfast, it's the most important meal of the day
- Sit down with people to eat your meal
- Try to get your 5 fruit and veg a day
- Cook your meals
- Reduce tea, coffee and energy drinks

### ☛ Sleeping well

- Relax in the evening – switch off TV and computer
- Avoid taking a nap during the day
- Do not think about sleeping too much
- Avoid caffeine or alcohol before night
- Prefer a milky caffeine free drink in the evening
- Make sure the clock is facing away from you

### ☛ Be active:

Activity releases endorphins and makes you feel better

- Prefer walking or cycling instead of the car or the bus : walking about 30 minutes a day reduces stress and help staying healthy
- Take the stairs instead of the lift
- Take a break in your studies and get outside to a green area it will boost your mood.
- Find a class to start a new activity (creativity, learning, sport)
- Volunteer for an organisation to get new skills and make new friends
- Bake or cook and share it with friends
- Take some relaxation or meditation session

**Don't let the stress cut you off from your friends! Keep time to enjoy yourself**

## ✎ **Avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs**

- Drinking or taking drugs to escape problems can make it worse
- It will disrupt sleep
- It can damage your health, relationships and bring finance problems

## **Need help?**

No matter how big or small is the issue, if you can't cope with your stress get some help!

Start with going to see your GP. S/he will advise you on treatment or may refer you to another professional.

You can also make an appointment with the university counsellor. Frances Kelly on [counselling@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:counselling@qmu.ac.uk)

Many voluntary organisations and websites provide help and advice on how to get better:

[www.student.counselling.co.uk](http://www.student.counselling.co.uk)

<http://www.infoscotland.com/stepsforstress/>

### **The Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

08457 90 90 90

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **Edinburgh Nightline**

[www.ednightline.com](http://www.ednightline.com)

0131 557 4444

[nightline@ed.ac.uk](mailto:nightline@ed.ac.uk)

## **2. Depression**

### **2.1 What is depression?**

Depression is a serious illness referring to the common experience of feeling down, miserable or fed up for a short period of time.



Everyone gets down and feel depressed at some point in his/her life. People will casually say they feel depressed after a bad day at work or a fight with family relative/friend or partner. We all experience time when we feel sad, frustrated or stress.

If lasting for long, these feelings can have a severe interference with your daily life.

It is hard to estimate exactly how many people are affected by depression as some of them are not diagnosed or do not look for help. But depression is common. It may concern anyone at any age although women and people with a family history of depression are twice likely than men to have depression.

Professionals identify three level of depression:

- **Mild depression in which there is some impact on your daily life**
- **Moderate depression in which there is significant impact on your daily life**
- **Severe depression in which activities of daily life are nearly impossible**

## **2.2 What cause depression?**

There is no single cause to depression and it often involves many factors.

Most of the time upsetting or stressful life events such as bereavement, divorce, illness, redundancy, money worries, being victim of a crime and accident will make people feeling depressed but it may happen that there is no obvious cause.

Women can face depression due to hormonal changes related to the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, miscarriage, childbirth and menopause.

Depression will often be triggered by all these factors and they can influence each other.

People also tends to be more depressed at winter time and if using excessive alcohol or street drugs such as cannabis and cocaine also frequently cause depression.

## **2.3 Recognizing depression**

People affected by depression lose a general interest in life that interferes with their work, social and family life.

When people are depressed they often have gloomy thoughts about themselves, the world and the future. They exaggerate the negative, over generalize bad events and don't see positive events in their life.

Symptoms of depression can be physical, psychological and social.

## EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

Low mood/sadness

Low self esteem

Tearfulness

Crying a lot Feeling hopeless and helplessness Feeling guilty

Irritable and intolerance of others Feeling anxious or worried

Lack of motivation and enjoyment

Suicidal thoughts

## PHYSICAL SIGNS

Slow movement and speech

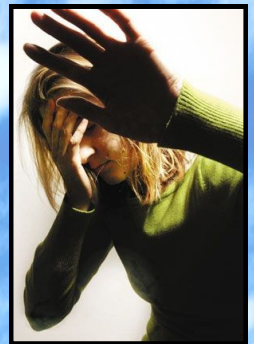
Change in appetite / Gaining or losing weight

Unexplained aches and pain

Lack of energy and tiredness

Changes to the menstrual cycles (women)

Sleeping problem/ difficulties to wake up



## SOCIAL IMPACTS

Not performing well at work

Taking part in fewer social activities

Avoiding contact with friends

Not doing things you used to enjoy

Difficulties in home and family life

Having difficulties to make decisions



If you are experiencing most of the above symptoms, don't let it persisting and consult your GP if you are feeling down for too long.

## **2.4 How to get better?**

If you are depressed, it is important that you seek the support of a professional such as your GP or a counselor.

☛ You can get support from the student counselor of QMU, Frances Kelly, [counseling@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:counseling@qmu.ac.uk)

☛ Your GP will advise you a treatment that may include the following:

- Daily plan to write down your achievements
- Exercise and activity
- Talking to a friend
- Cognitive behavior therapy, interpersonal therapy or counseling
- Self help reading material
- Antidepressant



☛ To help you to get better in your day to day life here a few tips:

- Take your medicines as directed by your GP
- Discuss reducing or stopping medication with your GP before making any change
- Take exercise and activities you enjoy
- Avoid smoking, drugs and alcohol
- Take some relaxation exercises, yoga session or meditation
- Eat well

☛ You may prefer self help guide or contacting an organization:

### **Breathing Space Scotland**

Confidential line for people feeling down or distressed.

Tel: 0800 83 85 87 (from 6.00pm to 2am)

[www.breathingspace.scotland.co.uk](http://www.breathingspace.scotland.co.uk)

### **The Samaritans**

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

08457 90 90 90

[jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **Edinburgh Nightline**

[www.ednightline.com](http://www.ednightline.com)

0131 557 4444

[nightline@ed.ac.uk](mailto:nightline@ed.ac.uk)

### **Depression Alliance Scotland**

Provide information, support, understanding and care needed for the best quality of life.

[www.dascot.org](http://www.dascot.org)

0845 123 23 20

[info@dascot.org](mailto:info@dascot.org)

### **Mood Juice**

Provide self-help resources, information and advice to those experiencing troublesome thought, feelings and actions.

[www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk)

### **Doing well**

A website that give users to measure their own level of depression and to find out what help is available

[www.doingwell.org.uk](http://www.doingwell.org.uk)

### **Living Life to the Full**

A Scottish interactive site for depression and anxiety where users can access cognitive behaviour therapy treatments online

[www.livinglifetothefull.com](http://www.livinglifetothefull.com)

### **Mood Gym**

An interactive site about ways of thinking that will help to prevent depression, based on cognitive behaviour therapy.

[www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)

**For further information or advice contact:**

**The Welfare Point  
The Students' Union  
Queen Margaret University  
Edinburgh EH10 4JE  
0131 474 0000  
[cguilloteau@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:cguilloteau@qmu.ac.uk)**

