Women's Health – Depression

An Advice Leaflet for Usdaw Members

USDAW EQUALITIES

Women and Depression...

Depression doesn't just affect women but women are twice as likely to experience depression than men. Statistics suggest that one in four women (compared to one in eight men) will experience depression at some point in their lives.

Factors that may increase the risk of depression in women are complex but include women's continuing social and economic inequality.

Depression can have a major effect on all aspects of life, including work, relationships and self-esteem.

A few people still think that depression is not a real illness and that it is a form of weakness or admission of failure.

This is simply not true. Depression is a real illness with real effects, and it is certainly not a sign of failure.

This leaflet is part of Usdaw's Women's Health series and is designed to raise women's awareness about depression, so that early and appropriate treatment can be sought.

We recognise that depression also affects men, and certain groups may be at higher risk such as LGBT+ members. Whilst it focuses on women, other members may find the advice useful too.

What is Depression?

Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in Britain.

It is a serious illness that should not be confused with feeling low or unhappy for a short period of time. People who experience depression cannot get better by just 'pulling themselves together'. Without appropriate treatment, symptoms can last weeks, months or years and at its most severe it can be life threatening.

What Causes Depression?

There is no single cause of depression. In most cases, it is a mixture of causes that triggers depression.

Types of Depression

To diagnose depression, doctors use interviews and questionnaires. There are no physical tests.

Depression is described by its seriousness, ranging from mild to severe:

- Mild depression – has some impact on daily life.
- Moderate depression – impacts significantly on daily life.
- Severe depression – activities of daily life are almost impossible.

There is a range of other types of depression, including post-natal depression, bipolar disorder (used to be called manic depression), seasonal affective disorder and chronic mild depression (dysthymia).

Treatment

Depression can be treated. With the right treatment and support, most people can make a full recovery from depression. The vast majority of people will make a full recovery from depression within four to six months. It is important to seek help from your GP if you think you may be depressed.

What treatment you are offered depends on the type of depression. The most commonly used treatments are a combination of:

- Talking therapies.
- Antidepressants.
- Self help.

Antidepressants can help reduce the symptoms of depression and associated anxiety. Talk to your GP about any worries you may have about taking them.

If you are depressed, even the most everyday or routine tasks, such as getting up in the morning or opening the post, can prove an uphill struggle; however, the following activities can sometimes help:

- Exercise and keeping active. There is evidence that physical activity, even if it is just a short walk, can help overcome depression.
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs.
- Avoiding stress (including work-related stress).
- Carrying on with pleasant activities. Depression takes away someone's enjoyment of things they used to get pleasure from. But giving up doing pleasurable things can make your depression worse. Try and plan one thing each day that will give you pleasure – again, there is evidence this helps overcome depression.
- Talk to your Union rep, who can support and help you at work, especially if you are being disciplined for absences that relate to your depression.

None of these are miracle cures – overcoming depression takes time and your GP, friends, family and Union rep can support you along the way.

Women are often carers for people living with depression. Those who find themselves in this situation can find it difficult to look after their own physical and mental health and should talk to their GP if they are worried about their health.

Symptoms

The symptoms of depression are complex as they affect people in different ways.

It often takes time to realise that you are depressed and not everyone recognises the symptoms, which can be physical, psychological and social.

Physical Symptoms

These include:

- Disturbed sleep patterns.
- Fatigue and a lack of energy.
- Unexplained aches and pains.
- Lack of interest in sex.
- Change in appetite or weight.

Psychological Symptoms

These include:

- Continuous low mood or sadness, negative thoughts, suicidal thoughts.
- Irritability, anxiety.
- Lack of interest and motivation.
- Crying for little or no reason.

Social Symptoms

These include:

- Difficulties in home and family life.
- Decrease in hobbies and interests.
- Avoiding contact with friends and taking part in fewer activities.
- Not doing well at work.

Helplines, Counselling and Other Support

The following organisations offer support and information about depression and other issues that can impact women's mental health:

The Samaritans

24 hour confidential, emotional support for anyone in a crisis.

Helpline: **116 123**
email: **jo@samaritans.org**
web: **www.samaritans.org**

A self-help app and online chat are available on the website.

Mind

Advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem and campaigning to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding. Emergency advice and crisis resources are also available online.

Support Line: **0300 102 1234**
Infoline: **0300 123 3393**
email: **info@mind.org.uk**
web: **www.mind.org.uk**
Legal line: **0300 466 6463**

Gingerbread

Advice and practical support for single parent families.

Helpline: **0808 802 0925**
web: **www.gingerbread.org.uk**

PANDAS Foundation

Support and advice for families experiencing pre- and post-natal mental illness.

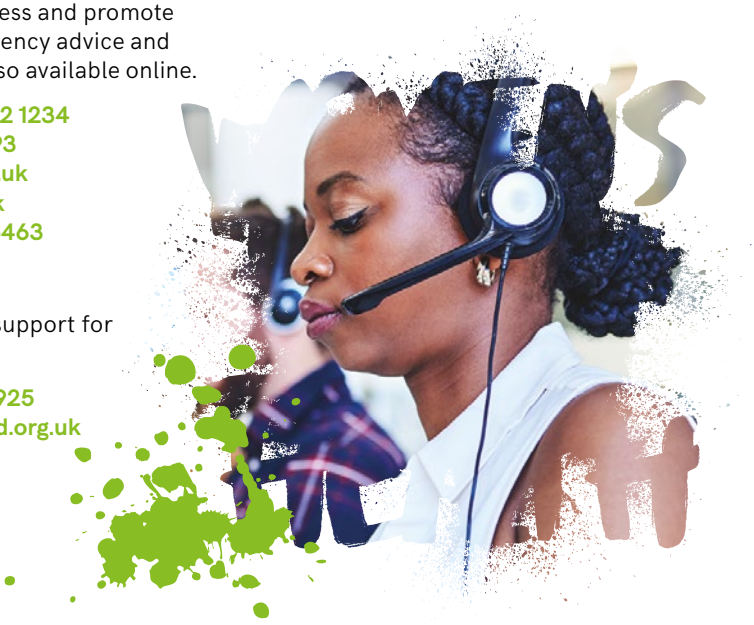
Helpline: **0808 1961 776**
email: **info@pandasfoundation.org.uk**
web: **www.pandasfoundation.org.uk**

Women's Aid

Free 24-hour domestic violence helpline providing support for women and children.

Helpline: **0808 2000 247**
email: **helpline@womensaid.org.uk**
web: **www.womensaid.org.uk**

Live chat is available on the website.



More Information

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively, you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office or visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk**
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

Mental Health Campaign

Usdaw takes both the physical and mental wellbeing of its members very seriously. To learn more about Usdaw's Mental Health Campaign – including online courses for members and reps – visit: **www.usdaw.org.uk/MHC**

Scan to learn more about the campaign

Join Usdaw

You can join online at: **www.usdaw.org.uk/JoinUs**

Scan to join today

What Happens Next

Once we process your application, you will receive a membership card with our Helpline telephone number and a New Member's Pack giving details of all the benefits and professional services available to you.

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Stock photography, posed by models

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Our publications are regularly updated. View the latest version at: **www.usdaw.org.uk/WH3**

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