

## Managing Low Mood

### What do we mean by 'low mood'?

Everyone feels low or down from time to time. It does not always mean something is wrong. Feeling low is common after distressing events or major life changes, but sometimes periods of low mood happen for no obvious reason.

You may feel tired, lacking confidence, frustrated, angry and worried. But a low mood will often pass after a couple of days or weeks – and there are some easy things you can try and small changes you can make that will usually help improve your mood.



Creazilla  
EmojiOne project

If you're still feeling down or no longer get pleasure from things for most of each day and this lasts for several weeks, you may be experiencing depression.

### What are the common signs of low mood?

You may notice some of the following signs or symptoms. Tick those that apply to you.

#### Emotions or feelings

- Feeling sad, guilty, upset, or numb
- Little enjoyment in things
- Feeling alone even when you're with people
- Crying a lot or unable to cry when a truly sad event occurs
- Feeling angry, irritable or frustrated
- Feeling worried, anxious or panicky

#### Physical signs

- Tiredness
- Lack of energy
- Restlessness
- Sleep problems or changes to your normal sleep pattern such as waking early
- Changes in weight, appetite and eating

#### Thoughts

- Losing confidence in yourself
- Expecting the worst and having negative or gloomy thoughts
- Thinking that everything seems hopeless
- Thinking that you dislike yourself
- Poor memory or concentration

#### Behaviour

- Difficulty in making decisions
- Lack of motivation
- Putting things off
- Not doing things you used to enjoy
- Avoiding seeing people, even those you care about

## Occupational Therapy for People with Chronic Pain

If you're still feeling down or no longer get pleasure from things for most of each day and this lasts for several weeks, you may be experiencing depression. When we are depressed, we tend to think more negatively about our past, are critical of ourselves and feel hopeless about our future.

You will notice that some of the symptoms listed above can also be associated with chronic pain or side effects from particular medication. Sometimes it can be hard to separate out which is which.



Mohamed Hassan  
on Pixabay

If you're having thoughts that life's not worth living, or you're self-harming or thinking about doing so, it's important to tell someone. You do not have to struggle alone – urgent help and support is available right now if you need it. There is some information at the end of this section about where you can get help.

### What causes low mood?

Life affects us all differently. We all go through difficult times, and negative emotions can be a healthy reaction to the challenges we face. But for many of us, things can become more serious, and each year as many as 1 in 4 of us experiences a mental health problem.

Being aware of what can affect our mental health can make it easier to understand when we, or someone we care about, are struggling, and helps us think about what we can do to improve things or where to get support.

Our mental health can be affected by our childhood experiences which shape our brain development when young. The experiences we have throughout our life will also have an impact, including the relationships we have. Our genes and personality may also make some of us more likely to develop certain kinds of mental health problems.

The way we think about life and the challenges we face, will be affected by all of these things. There are many situations or life events that can affect us and make us feel distressed or less able to cope. We all respond to life's challenges differently – there's no single "right way" to react.

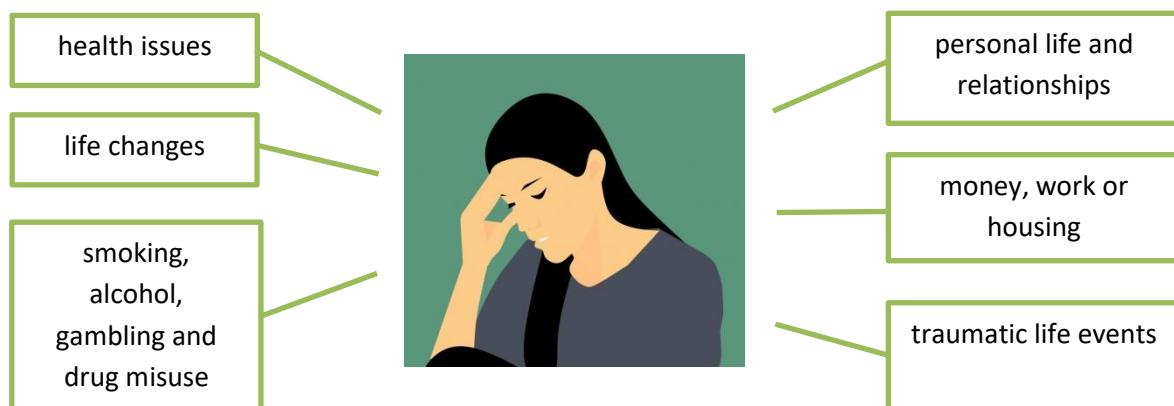


Publicdomainq.net

It may be everyday events, one-off experiences or several things building up. Even experiences that are positive can be difficult to cope with sometimes. How we feel is often a completely natural reaction to challenges. But for some of us, these feelings can become more difficult to manage, especially if they do not go away after a while.

# Occupational Therapy for People with Chronic Pain

Things that affect our mental wellbeing include:



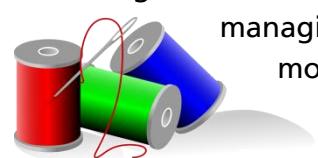
Some of us are more deeply affected by events than others. How we deal with things can also depend on how well other parts of our life are going or how well supported we feel.

## What can I do to improve my mood?

Here are our top tips:

### 1. Increase helpful activity

Low mood can stop us doing important or enjoyable activities. Try listing these things and doing some each day. Research tells us that increased activity is very helpful in managing low mood. Start with easier ones and, as you progress, your mood should improve. It can help to make a daily plan and stick to it as if it were an important appointment that you need to keep.



### 2. Get good quality sleep

Low moods can make us feel tired. Tiredness can also have a bad impact on our mood, which in turn can have an impact on our pain levels. If sleep is a difficulty for you, ask your therapist for the handout about sleep, which goes into greater detail about managing sleep difficulties.



### 3. Be kind to yourself

Try to break big tasks down into manageable chunks, and do not try to do everything at once. Give yourself credit when you complete each bit. Try to focus on the things you have achieved rather than the things you haven't. Some people find it helpful to keep a gratitude diary to record things that went well and/or they feel grateful for each day. Choose a time in the evening and spend a



## Occupational Therapy for People with Chronic Pain

few minutes jotting down two or three things you are grateful for you from the day. You might like to have a nice notebook especially for this.

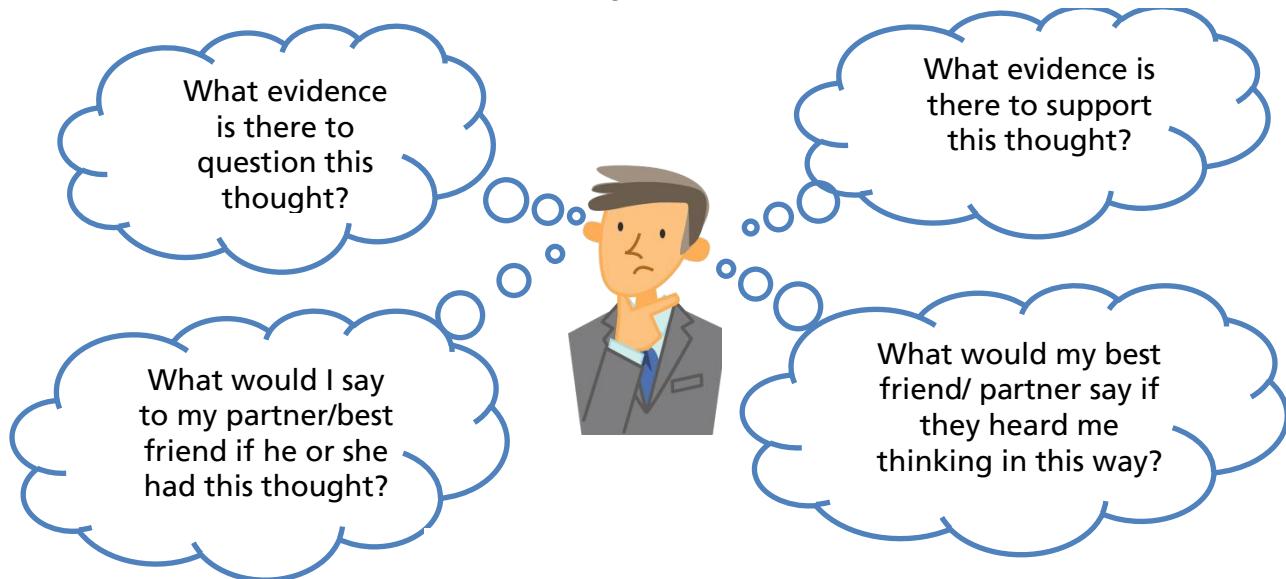
### 4. Use relaxation/meditation regularly

When we feel particularly stressed or low, our muscles can become tense and our minds can race with thoughts. Sometimes we can feel overwhelmed with the thoughts our minds produce, and it can help to use relaxation exercises to calm the mind and body. There are many different types of relaxation, with different types appealing to different people, which is why it is important to try out some different kinds to see what suits you best.

### 5. Challenge unhelpful thoughts

The way we think affects the way we feel. Sometimes negative thoughts can stop us from doing the things that we would normally do and are important to us. We might say to ourselves 'what's the point?' or 'I can't face it' and this can have a negative effect on our activity levels. As a result, we can experience self-critical thoughts about being lazy, irresponsible or guilty, which make us feel even worse and able to do less and less. It can help us to challenge these thoughts when we first notice them before they take hold.

It can help to ask ourselves the following questions:



Now try to think up an alternative balanced thought.

## Occupational Therapy for People with Chronic Pain

Here is an example to show you what we mean...

### EXAMPLE

Imagine you are in a local shop and someone you know well walks by and doesn't speak to you.

What do you immediately think? You could explain this to yourself in a number of ways. Let us say that you jumped to the very negative conclusion that 'She doesn't like me'. You might notice some altered physical symptoms such as feeling low in energy and restless; that evening you may have difficulty sleeping. This might lead to altered emotions (feeling even lower in mood). Your altered physical and emotional feelings may cause you to go home and avoid company. In the longer term you might possibly avoid the person or act differently towards her, and ultimately may lose the friendship.

Can you see how unhelpful thoughts and altered behaviour in this instance may act to keeping the low mood going? Avoidance of this friend in future can prevent us from recognising that our interpretation of her behaviour was both unhelpful and untrue. These actions can end up reducing your confidence still further and maintaining the low mood.

**But...**what if you have misinterpreted your friend's behaviour? Revisit the questions above to challenge the thoughts that 'She doesn't like me'. Ask yourself the following:

**What evidence is there to support this thought?** *She walked past me without looking at me.*

**What evidence is there to question this thought?** *Maybe she was trying to remember what she needed to buy from the shop and wasn't concentrating. Perhaps she genuinely didn't see me.*

**What would my best friend/partner say if they heard me thinking in this way?**  
*They'd say I was a good friend, friendly and approachable. Maybe she was preoccupied and really didn't see me in the shop.*

**What would I say to my partner/best friend if he or she had this thought?** *I would say that I know that friend has a busy family life and she was probably rushing to get everything done and wasn't paying attention to who else was in the shop. It's nothing to worry about and doesn't mean she has changed her mind about being my friend.*

**Perhaps a more balanced thought could be something like:** *'There's no evidence that she doesn't like me anymore. She was probably busy or preoccupied and just didn't see me. I would like to catch up with her though...maybe I will give her a call tomorrow and see how she is.'*

## Over to You

Using the ideas above, think about what steps you could take to help improve how you feel.

**My ideas of what I can do to help:**

Increasing helpful activity	
Challenging unhelpful thoughts	
Getting good quality sleep	
Being Kind to myself	
Using relaxation	
Other ideas	

# Occupational Therapy for People with Chronic Pain

## Further sources of support

If you feel so low that thoughts of harming yourself, or ending your own life have been in your mind, then please visit your GP as soon as possible and ask for help. If you cannot visit your GP and feel that you cannot keep yourself safe, please attend A&E and ask for help from the Mental Health Service.

## Useful organisations:

### *Samaritans*

Tel: 116 123

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org) [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Confidential support for anyone in a crisis.

### **Useful Apps/Websites;**

#### *Bipolar UK*

A charity helping people living with manic depression or bipolar disorder.

Website: [www.bipolaruk.org.uk](http://www.bipolaruk.org.uk)

#### *Men's Health Forum*

24/7 stress support for men by text, chat and email.

Website: [www.menshealthforum.org.uk](http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk)

#### *Mental Health Foundation*

Provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

#### *Mind*

Promotes the views and needs of people with mental health problems.

Phone: 0300 123 3393 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)

Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

#### *SANE*

Emotional support, information and guidance for people affected by mental illness, their families and carers.

Textcare: comfort and care via text message, sent when the person needs it most:

[www.sane.org.uk/textcare](http://www.sane.org.uk/textcare) Peer support forum: [www.sane.org.uk/supportforum](http://www.sane.org.uk/supportforum)

Website: [www.sane.org.uk/support](http://www.sane.org.uk/support)

- Calm App
- Headspace
- Stop, Breathe & Think app
- Insight Timer app

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

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