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PALS

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**Avon and Wiltshire
Mental Health Partnership**
NHS Trust

Depression

**A serious mental health condition that is
beyond feeling a bit sad.**

This leaflet for older adults, family members and carers explains what clinical depression is, what causes it and how it is treated

you matter, we care

Introduction

Many of us experience periods in our lives when we feel despondent, dejected, perhaps a bit tearful and sad. These feelings are usually a response to events in our lives and they pass after a short while. For some people the feelings don't pass, but deepen into a condition that requires treatment.

What is depression?

Serious depression is a mood disorder and it can be divided into two types:

1. Reactive depression that arises from life events such as loss of a role or bereavement
2. Endogenous depression that appears to have no obvious causative event.

A severe, clinical depression is commonly characterised by loss of pleasure in most aspects of life, self-neglect, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, tearfulness and thoughts and expressions that show depressive thinking.

In very severe cases a person may stop eating completely. They may develop ideas not based in reality: for example, that they have no money, that everyone wishes they were dead. They may stop looking after themselves. The person may think about, make plans for, or even succeed in taking their own life.

The loss of a spouse or someone you are very close to, can be equally devastating and lead to similar feelings. However these are not seen as 'illness' unless they carry on for a very long time without lessening.

What causes depression?

As stated above, depression can occur in response to an event, but sometimes it occurs spontaneously. For a few older people, the cause may be the early stages of a dementia, but more usually the cause is a change in the level of chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain.

Treatment options

Given enough time, most people experiencing depression will recover. However, depression can be a serious condition requiring treatment.

- Medications known as antidepressants help rebalance the chemicals in the brain and allow mood to recover.
- If present, disordered thinking can usually be managed with antipsychotic medication.
- When well enough, psychological therapies can help people understand the causes of depression or how to manage the thoughts which often come with it
- In very severe, life-threatening depression, Electro Convulsive Therapy (ECT) may be considered necessary.

A severely depressed person often fails to think that they were once their 'normal' self and will be so again.

Family and carers need to support the person through this difficult time and reassure them that things will be better in the future.