

Depression and brain tumours

A brain tumour diagnosis is a major life event which can have a significant effect on your emotional wellbeing.

If you, or someone close to you is living with a brain tumour, it's very natural to experience moments when you feel distressed and overwhelmed. However, in some cases, these feelings linger on for weeks and months. This could be a sign of depression.

This fact sheet gives information about the symptoms and possible causes of depression, as well as ways of coping and possible treatment options.

In this fact sheet:

- What is depression?
- Signs and symptoms of depression
- What causes depression?
- Can a brain tumour cause depression?
- How can my depression be treated?
- Other things that could help you cope better
- Helpful resources

What is depression?

Depression is not a sign of weakness and is certainly nothing to be ashamed of. Like many physical conditions, depression is an illness which can usually be managed or treated if dealt with appropriately.

Around 1 in 10 people in the UK suffer from depression at some point in their lives. It can range from feeling relatively low for a number of weeks with no interest in what you usually enjoy, to having persistent negative thoughts and finding it mentally and physically difficult to take part in your usual daily activities.

If you are affected by a brain tumour and feel you cannot cope with your current situation, you can call The Brain Tumour Charity's Support & Information Line on:

0808 800 0004 (Mon–Fri, 9:00 –17:00)

Email: support@thebraintumourcharity.org

If you need someone to talk to outside office hours, you can call the Samaritans on 116 123.

What are the signs and symptoms of depression?

Symptoms of depression may vary from person to person, but can include:

- feeling low for most of the day
- feeling fatigued or lacking in energy
- having persistent negative thoughts
- losing interest in the things you used to enjoy
- feeling overly emotional or lacking emotion (apathy)
- having difficulty focusing on tasks or making decisions
- being unusually anxious, irritable or agitated
- Sleeping for longer than usual, or having difficulty falling asleep
- feeling less affectionate towards other people

Depression can affect each person differently. However, most people with depression suffer from more than one of the above symptoms. If you think you might be depressed, seeking advice from your GP would be a good first step in dealing with depression.

Can my brain tumour cause depression?

A brain tumour diagnosis can affect a person in a number of ways that could potentially lead to some form of short or long-term depression:

- **Through the shock of receiving a diagnosis**
Everything we have built over the years, our expectations, our way of life and our reality, can be threatened instantly by a brain tumour diagnosis. A person can go from feeling psychologically secure and content with their life to feeling fearful and uncertain. Experiencing such feelings is natural following a brain tumour diagnosis and in some people it could contribute to the onset of depression.
- **Through a tumour's effect on the brain**
The brain controls all aspects of our personality. In some cases, a growing tumour can press against the structures which regulate mood, causing unusual mood swings and, in some cases, depression.
- **By affecting your quality of life**
A brain tumour can cause some forms of physical or cognitive disability which can limit what you are able to do and how you socialise. For example, if you experience difficulty moving around due to a brain tumour, you may leave the house less than you used to, or be unable to do the physical activities you used to enjoy before your diagnosis. If you are caring for someone with a brain tumour, you may have a lot less time to spend on yourself, seeing friends and doing the things you used to enjoy. You may also have to give up work for a period of time. These would be major changes in anyone's life, affecting their emotional wellbeing in the short or long-term.

For more information, see the 'Carers—looking after yourself' and other relevant fact sheets at bit.ly/LivingWithaBT

What else can cause depression?

There is no one cause for depression but several factors have been found to increase the chance of developing depression. These include:

- Having had depression in the past
- Having a family history of depression
- Not having other people to talk to
- Having to deal with a lot of difficult situations at once
- Taking certain medication which increase the chance of developing depression

How can I cope with low mood and mild depression?

There are some self-help techniques that you may find helpful. These include:

- **Maintaining social contact**
Interacting with other people can keep your mind from negative thought patterns. The more time you spend interacting with others, the less time you spend dwelling on things which make you sad and things which are perhaps out of your control. Even if you feel that you are not up for it, try and take every opportunity to interact with others because maintaining social contact could help improve your condition over time.
- **Joining a support network**
Joining a physical, or virtual (e.g. Facebook) support group allows you to meet people who may be going through something similar. Knowing that you are not alone, and sharing experiences with others who are, or have been, in similar situations is something many find quite comforting.

If you are affected by a brain tumour you can join The Brain Tumour Charity Facebook support group by visiting: bit.ly/supportonfacebook

To find a support group in your local area visit:

thebraintumourcharity.org/get-support/support-groups/

- **Keeping your energy at comfortable levels**
When we are tired or sleep deprived we can often feel more emotional. Living with a brain tumour, or caring for someone with a brain tumour can make daily life quite tiring. Try to be aware of how your body feels and plan times to rest so your energy reserves are not drained to the point of exhaustion.

For more information see our 'Carers' and 'Fatigue and brain tumours' fact sheet.

- **Taking up some form of moderate exercise**
Studies have shown that even a moderate amount of exercise can lead to improved mood. Even if you begin with a 20 minute walk every day, it could contribute to an improvement in your mood.

Can my depression be treated?

The first step in dealing with depression is to recognise and accept the fact that you may be suffering from it. Depression can make you doubt your own judgement, make you more introverted and less confident. This can make you reluctant to seek help and express how you feel. **It is important for you to understand that it is natural to feel this way and that it is ok tell your loved ones, and your GP exactly what you are going through.**

Your GP will suggest the appropriate treatment options for you based on the severity of your condition. This could be a combination of talking therapies and antidepressant medication:

- **Talking therapies**
If you are affected by mild to moderate depression which doesn't show any signs of improving, your GP may refer you for a talking therapy. There are different types of talking therapy for depression, including psychotherapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and counselling.

For more information on the different types of talking therapies visit the NHS website:

nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/pages/types-of-therapy.aspx

- **Psychiatry**
If you suffer from moderate to severe depression, your GP may refer you to a psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a medically qualified doctor who specialises in psychiatry. As with talking therapies, a psychiatrist can offer emotional support and discuss topics which trouble you. However, as a medically qualified professional, a psychiatrist can prescribe medication such as antidepressants and refer you for other types of treatment.

- **Antidepressants**
Antidepressants are tablets prescribed for moderate or severe depression. There are almost 30 different kinds of antidepressant. Like any other medication, antidepressants can cause side effects, although these are usually quite mild. Your doctor or psychiatrist will take into consideration other treatment(s) you may be receiving for your brain tumour when choosing which antidepressants to prescribe.

For more information on antidepressants visit the NHS website at: nhs.uk/conditions/Antidepressant-drugs/Pages/Introduction.aspx

Helpful resources

If you or someone close to you is suffering from depression, you may find the following list of resources helpful:

Samaritans

A 24 hour helpline with trained people who can listen to you when you need someone to talk to. (Free to call from landline and mobile)

Tel: 116 123 (UK and ROI)

Website: samaritans.org

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Saneline

SANE's mental health helpline is a national, out-of-hours service offering emotional support and information every day.

Tel: 0300 304 7000 (6pm - 11pm)

Website: sane.org.uk

MIND

MIND is a mental health organisation that provides support and information.

Tel: 0300 123 3393 (09.00 - 18.00, Mon - Fri)

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Text: 86463

Depression Alliance

Depression Alliance is a charity that offers information and support to people affected by depression:

Tel: 0207 407 7584

Website: depressionalliance.org

Email: info@depressionalliance.org

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Niamh Wellbeing (Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health)

A network of support services throughout Northern Ireland supporting mental wellbeing:

Tel: 028 9032 8474

Website: niamhwellbeing.org

Carers UK

Provides information and support for carers:

Carersline: 0808 808 7777 (10am-4pm, Mon-Fri)

Website: carersuk.org

Email: advice@carersuk.org

You may find these books helpful in understanding and coping with depression:

A Cancer Patient's Guide to Overcoming Depression and Anxiety:

Getting through treatment and getting back to your life

Authors: Derek R. Hopko and Carl W. Lejuez

New Harbinger Publications, 2008

ISBN 13 978 157224504-4

Living with the Black Dog: How to cope when your partner is depressed

Author: Caroline Carr

White Ladder Press Ltd, 2007

ISBN 13 9781905410101

What if I have further questions?

If you require further information, any clarification of information, or wish to discuss any concerns, please contact our Support and Information Team:

Call: 0808 800 0004

(free from landlines and most mobiles:
3, O2, Orange, T-mobile, EE, Virgin and Vodafone)

Email: support@thebraintumourcharity.org

Join our closed Facebook group:

bit.ly/supportonfacebook

bit.ly/carersupportgroup

About us

The Brain Tumour Charity makes every effort to ensure that we provide accurate, up-to-date and unbiased facts about brain tumours. We hope that these will add to the medical advice you have already been given. Please do continue to talk to your health team if you are worried about any medical issues.

The Brain Tumour Charity is at the forefront of the fight to defeat brain tumours and is the only national charity making a difference every day to the lives of people with a brain tumour and their families. We fund pioneering research to increase survival, raise awareness of the symptoms and effects of brain tumours and provide support for everyone affected to improve quality of life.

We rely 100% on charitable donations to fund our vital work. If you would like to make a donation, or want to find out about other ways to support us including fundraising, leaving a gift in your will or giving in memory, please visit us at thebraintumourcharity.org, call us on 01252 749990 or email fundraising@thebraintumourcharity.org

About this fact sheet

This fact sheet has been written and edited by The Brain Tumour Charity's Support and Information Team. The accuracy of medical information has been verified by a leading neuropsychologist. Our fact sheets have been produced with the assistance of patient and carer representatives and up-to-date, reliable sources of evidence. If you would like a list of references for any of the fact sheets, or would like more information about how we produce them, please contact us.



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Your notes

Research | Awareness | Support



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