

Depression

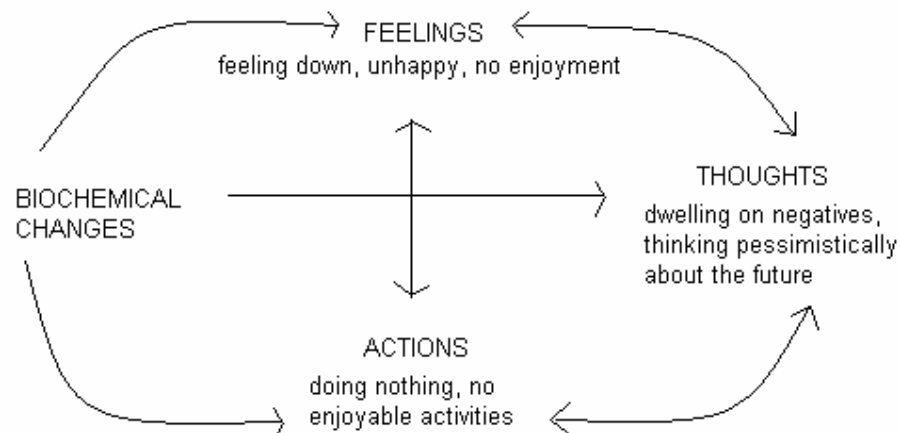
Feeling down, upset and unhappy are all normal feelings and are frequently in response to unpleasant events. These feelings are appropriate responses and are nothing to be concerned about.

However, when negative feelings persist for more than a few weeks, and begin to affect most areas of your life, it is important to recognise that such feelings may be to be resolved, possible through counseling or therapy.

Depression is a clinical term for persistent negative emotions. Common symptoms of depression are:-

- Feeling gloomy, pessimistic and hopeless about life.
- Lack of motivation and difficulty in doing even routine things such as personal grooming, housework or other work.
- An absence of any enjoyable activities in your life – even things that you may be enjoyed in the past lose any of their interest.
- Withdrawal, not wishing to associate with other people.
- Feeling worthless and useless
- In some cases, sleep disturbances (too much or too little), appetite disturbance (usually loss of appetite), weight loss, loss of interest in sex.

Depression may be caused by many factors, including a family tendency to be depressed, unpleasant life events such as a loss or bereavement, chronic stress, and poor physical health. However, once the cycle of depression begins it is hard to break out of it. The depression cycle is drawn below:-



When you are feeling down and unhappy, you are less likely to do nice things, and thus you reduce your enjoyment in life. Feeling down also changes the way you think, making you think about more unhappy and gloomy thoughts about yourself, your past and your future. The more pessimistic your thoughts become, the worse you feel and the less you feel like doing pleasant things.

Biochemical changes in the brain can also occur in some forms of depression, worsening the feelings of hopelessness and reducing activity levels.

Treatment involves combating depression on as many fronts as possible:

- If biochemical changes have occurred, anti-depressant medication may be necessary: see your doctor or ask for a referral to a psychiatrist who specialises in treating emotional disorders such as depression.
- Just as negative thoughts lead to more depressed feelings, changing the way you think through cognitive therapy can reverse the negative thinking habits.
- Gradually increasing your range of pleasant activities is necessary to introduce enjoyment into your life and start to improve feelings.
- What is the cause? e.g. if grief, bereavement/loss therapy helps.