

Managing Depression after Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)



*Information Guide for people
with Acquired Brain Injury and
their families and friends*

What is depression?

Most people feel 'a bit down' now and again. These feelings often follow events that have upset us more than usual. Most of the time, people will begin to feel better after a few days or weeks, especially when there is time and opportunity to make sense of, or sort out the problems.

For some people, these feelings may continue over a longer time, often making it difficult for them to carry on with daily activities and to 'be themselves'. There are many things that can lead to lasting feelings of sadness and depression. These can include how we have tackled similar problems in the past, the support we receive from others, the complexity of the problem and changes following illness. Feelings of sadness and depression are very common - it is believed that 1 in 5 people in Ireland will develop depression over their lifetime.

What does depression look like?

Depression usually changes the way a person thinks, feels, and behaves. The following is a list of commonly reported symptoms linked with depression:

- Low, irritable, or indifferent mood
- Loss of interest and enjoyment in life and things that we used to take pleasure in
- Lack of interest in personal appearance
- Eating more or less than before, leading to recent weight gain or loss
- Loss of interest in sex
- Sleeping more or less than usual and disrupted sleep
- Lack of energy
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty making decisions
- Loss of confidence or self-esteem
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Feelings of hopelessness about the future
- Increased restlessness or agitation
- Thoughts of harming oneself or of suicide

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What causes depression?

While depression can affect anyone, clinical research suggests that some people are more vulnerable to developing lasting feelings of depression than others. The factors that are currently considered to increase a person's vulnerability factors include:

Genetic factors: Depression is more likely if there is a family history of the condition.

Very stressful life events: Life events that we perceive to be overwhelming and lead to feelings of hopelessness, such as;

- Bereavement, especially of someone who was a source of support and comfort
- Breakdown of close personal relationships
- Loss of job and financial strain
- History of emotional, physical and or sexual abuse
- Experience of significant illness including brain injury

Depression and Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)

The risk of depression can increase following a brain injury. The signs of depression can be clear soon after diagnosis, or may develop many months or years later. Changes in the brain that are associated with ABI may lead to development of symptoms of depression. Some of the symptoms associated with brain injury are also features of depression which can lead to confusion about the diagnosis, for example, both conditions can include lack of motivation, distractibility, numbness of emotions, agitation, aggression, or poor self-hygiene. Feelings of depression can reduce the person's ability to have the motivation, mental energy and focus that are very important in order to manage and adapt to many of the problems associated with ABI.

What should you do if you are experiencing symptoms of depression?

If you experience continued feelings of low mood similar to those described above you should speak with those close to you and the health care professionals you are attending. It is important to highlight that many feelings of depression are very common, manageable and should not be ignored. Successful management of depression usually includes a range of interventions, including:

- Psychological therapies
- Medication. Speak to your GP about medication
- Self-help information and groups

What can you do to reduce feelings of depression?

When a person feels depressed, they often lack the motivation to do things that make them feel good and in control. This in turn leads to a vicious circle. By not undertaking such activities the person can often feel increasingly sad and isolated and so their feelings of depression continue and may increase. A helpful way to improve mood is to engage in activities that are pleasurable, provide a sense of achievement and are fun. Such activities often include having a chat with a friend, physical activities, hobbies and taking time to relax, and to think about the many good things around you.

Contacts:

If you find it difficult to speak about your feelings of depression with those around you including family, friends or health care professionals, you may also consider contacting the following confidential agencies:

Helplines: *Aware:* Tel: 01 676 6166 • *The Samaritans:* Tel: 1850 609090

Websites: www.reachout.com • www.leanonme.net/ie



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