



**NHS Newcastle and North Tyneside  
Community Health**

# Stress Control

## Week 4

# Part A

## *“DEPRESSION”*

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This handout has been extracted from a course handbook written by Jim White. It has been written for those people who, as part of their stress, suffer depression as a **secondary problem**. It divides into two sections:

### **Information Section**

What is depression?

Thoughts

Actions

Body

### **Treatment Section**

General advice

Working out the pattern

Controlling you thoughts

Controlling your actions

Controlling your body

Advice for relatives/friends

## **Information Section**

- What is depression?
- Thoughts
- Actions
- Body

### **What Is Depression?**

Ask people about their image of depression and they may describe someone sitting staring at the wall all day long, hardly moving and feeling sad all the time. While some people may react like this, others may be quite agitated – full of tension and stress, unable to sit still, even having panic attacks. Others may go through life putting on a mask – acting as if nothing in the world is the matter. Yet under the surface, they may feel that they can't go through this hell for another day.

Some people describe depression as being like a heavy cloud that settles over them. Winston Churchill, who suffered severe bouts of depression all his life, described it as 'a black dog' that followed him everywhere.

You may find that there is some kind of pattern to your depression – maybe you feel worse first thing then pick up as the day goes on. You may have the opposite pattern. You may feel better as long as there are friends or family around. Perhaps the depression clears up for a while and then, for no reason, returns. You may feel low all the time.

As with stress, no two people will experience depression in exactly the same way but it will help to identify with the general descriptions in this handout.

### **When does depression become a problem?**

We all feel fed-up, frustrated and bored from time to time. We sometimes feel things aren't working out as we would like them to. We talk about having 'a fit of the blues'. This is normal and part and parcel of life. Often these feelings don't last long and can be shifted by doing something to help cheer yourself up. Although we often call these feelings 'depression', this is not the same as the depression written about in this handout.

Just like stress, there is no clear cut off between normal and clinical depression. It is in the eye of the beholder but severe depression is an awful thing and people who are depressed will say that they would not wish it on their worst enemy.

### **Is it a common problem?**

Depression is a very common problem. Roughly 2 out of 10 people will suffer a period of depression at some point during their life. Women are twice as likely to suffer depression as men. Roughly 3 out of 10 people who have stress as their main problem will have depression as a secondary problem. Often the depression is every bit as bad as the stress.

### **Are there different types of depression?**

The two most common forms of depression are called **major depression** and **dysthymia**. The former is when a cloud of depression settles over you and doesn't shift even for one day. The latter is when the depression is there for days rather than a long period of time. The common symptoms of both will be found later in this handout.

There is also **post-natal depression** which can affect a mother after the birth of a child and can range from mild 'baby blues' to a full blown (but rare) psychiatric condition which requires professional help. **Manic-depression** is another rare condition, the causes of which are very different from the causes of major and dysthymic depression. In this, the person may veer from deep depression to manic excitement. In this handout, 'depression' always refers to major and dysthymic depression.

### **What causes depression?**

When it is secondary to stress, it may have been caused by the things which caused the stress. As a main problem, it is usually caused by a number of things which interact. These include life events; childhood factors such as losing parents at an early age; lack of a strong, confiding relationship; and in-built factors – some people may be more prone to depression than others.

Each of these factors, on their own, may not be enough to cause depression but, when combined, can be very powerful. This is important

to remember. Even if you are more prone to depression because of the way you are made, controlling other factors may be enough to stop it becoming a long-term problem.

### **What keeps depression going?**

When the depression is secondary to stress, the stress itself is the main thing keeping it going. So working on getting your stress down should help control the depression. To speed it up, you can also look at the other factors which might be keeping it going. The same problems affecting your thoughts, actions and body that you saw in the other sections of this programme will be important and so you will find them again in this booklet. This time, they are specific to depression.

### **How do you know if you are depressed?**

This is sometimes hard to answer. There may be a great number of people going about their everyday life who are depressed yet don't label it as such. You might be able to identify depression based on **a change** in your mood and your behaviour. So if you no longer take pleasure in doing certain things, feel irritated a good deal of the time for no reason, feel tired, or can't concentrate too well then depression may be the cause. You may find that your relatives and friends notice these changes before you do.

When we looked at stress in the handouts and the class, we divided it up into thoughts, actions and body – **TAB**. We can do the same with depression. Before that, we will look at Elaine's problem on the next page.

## Elaine

“It’s like a cloud descending on me. I can feel it coming and I can’t do a thing to stop it. I hate the way it takes over my life and how it affects everything I do. I wake up in the morning dreading the coming day. I want to pull the sheets over my head and hide from the world. I have to force myself through each day.

I try to do my best for the family – put on a happy face when I really feel like death warmed up but I feel I’m really letting them down. To give you an example, my daughter broke up with her boyfriend and I just felt so numb inside that I had to go through the motions of knowing how she felt rather than actually feeling it. The family do their best to help but I just let them down all the time. I feel so responsible for everything – the standing joke in our house is that when there is another disaster reported on the news, it’s mum’s fault because I take the blame for everything”

**Elaine is a 42 year old waitress who has had anxiety and depression for the last year although she feels they have been creeping up on her for a long time before that. She is happily married and says she is a very lucky person to have a good marriage, loving family and good health. She feels she has no reason to be tense and depressed but feels powerless to do anything about it.**

“There is a feeling that there is no point in doing things properly and so everything is half-hearted. My niece has just had a little boy and I can’t be bothered going round to see them – that’s just not like me – I hate myself for being like this. I wonder where the old me has gone. I feel cut off from my friends and the people at work. They look forward to Christmas – I dread Christmas; they laugh at the world, I take it all so seriously; they get on with their lives, I’m trapped in this black hole.

I wish I knew what I could do to get myself better but I just see it dragging on and on. Although people say I’ll get better, I feel that I’m always going to be like this.”

## Thoughts

### Susan, Housewife, 38 Years Old

*"I just can't go on like this. I have no pleasure, everything is a struggle. There is no point in life anymore. I've messed things up for everyone. I'm useless. My family would be better off without me."*

### Neil, Bricklayer, 24 Years Old

*"I feel dead inside. No wonder I lost that job – I'm just a failure. Life will never change, I'm just wasting your time when you will have people waiting to see you who deserve help a lot more than I do."*

These thoughts are so black and set in concrete – "I'm useless"... "Life will never change".

When you are depressed, your thinking changes – it becomes more bleak, more pessimistic. Your self-image changes – you feel inferior, feel that you can't handle things anymore, feel that you are always struggling. Nothing comes easy any more. Suicidal thoughts are common:

*"I can't go on, I would be better off dead"*

*"I hope I don't wake up in the morning"*

It is crucial that you accept (even if you can't believe it right now) that depression changes the way you see the world and yourself. You may be blind to ways of coping which are hidden by your depression. Therapy will aim at opening up these ways to you. If you feel a strong sense of hopelessness and if you feel that there is no way out except by suicide, tell your doctor or therapist straight way.

Some of the common thoughts in depression are shown in the following box;

## **Thoughts**

Poor concentration

Feeling “flat”

Loss of pleasure in life

Seeing the future as black

Feeling alone in the world

Loss of interest

Loss of sexual interest

Feeling guilty

Feeling worthless

Thoughts of death or suicide

Loss of self-confidence

Poor self-esteem/self-hatred

Feeling inadequate

Brooding

## **Actions**

Some people who are depressed will show few signs of it on the surface even though they may be in turmoil under the surface. Yet even with a mask on, there are usually signs which family/friends/workmates will detect.

**Perhaps** you start to withdraw from life – you stop going out to the football on a Saturday, you stay in your office rather than go to the canteen at breaks. You stop watching the TV news or your favourite soap opera because you ‘can’t be bothered’. Maybe you know what you should do to feel better but can’t build up the energy to do it.

**Perhaps** you become more quick tempered. A loving mother shouts and hits her child for the slightest reason. A loving husband sits in the living room almost daring his wife to start an argument so that he can jump down her throat. An easy going friend becomes so volatile that others don’t want to go to the pub with him in case he starts some trouble. You may feel so full of self-hatred that you try to hurt yourself.

**Perhaps** you find yourself bursting into tears whenever a painful thought comes into your mind. Perhaps you cry often for no obvious reason. This may happen in front of people leaving you feeling embarrassed.

**Perhaps** you find yourself making a lot of silly mistakes at work. Maybe you feel that you are not up to the work and that it is only a matter of time before your boss notices this and gets rid of you.

Some of the common depressed actions are in the following box;

## **Actions**

Agitation

Frequent crying

Withdrawing from life

Irritation/aggression

Drinking more

Smoking more

Avoiding making decisions

Poorer performance

Letting people walk over you

Harming yourself

## **Body**

Many body symptoms of depression are similar to those of stress. Often you lose your appetite – sometimes you end up eating a lot more (eating for comfort, for example). This may lead to weight loss or weight gain.

Panic attacks are often found with depression.

You might lie awake thinking about your problems or wake up during the night. Sometimes, you may wake early in the morning and know that you are not going to get to sleep again.

You may feel that you're never well or that you never feel 100%. You may feel that your body, like your mind, has lost its sharpness.

You may feel tired too often or exhausted even after a mild exertion. You may feel that you are dragging yourself through the day.

The following box lists some of the common body symptoms of depression. As you can see, a lot of the symptoms can go to either extreme.

## **Body**

Decreased appetite

Increased appetite

Difficulty getting to sleep

Waking up during the night

Waking early in the morning

Weight gain

Weight loss

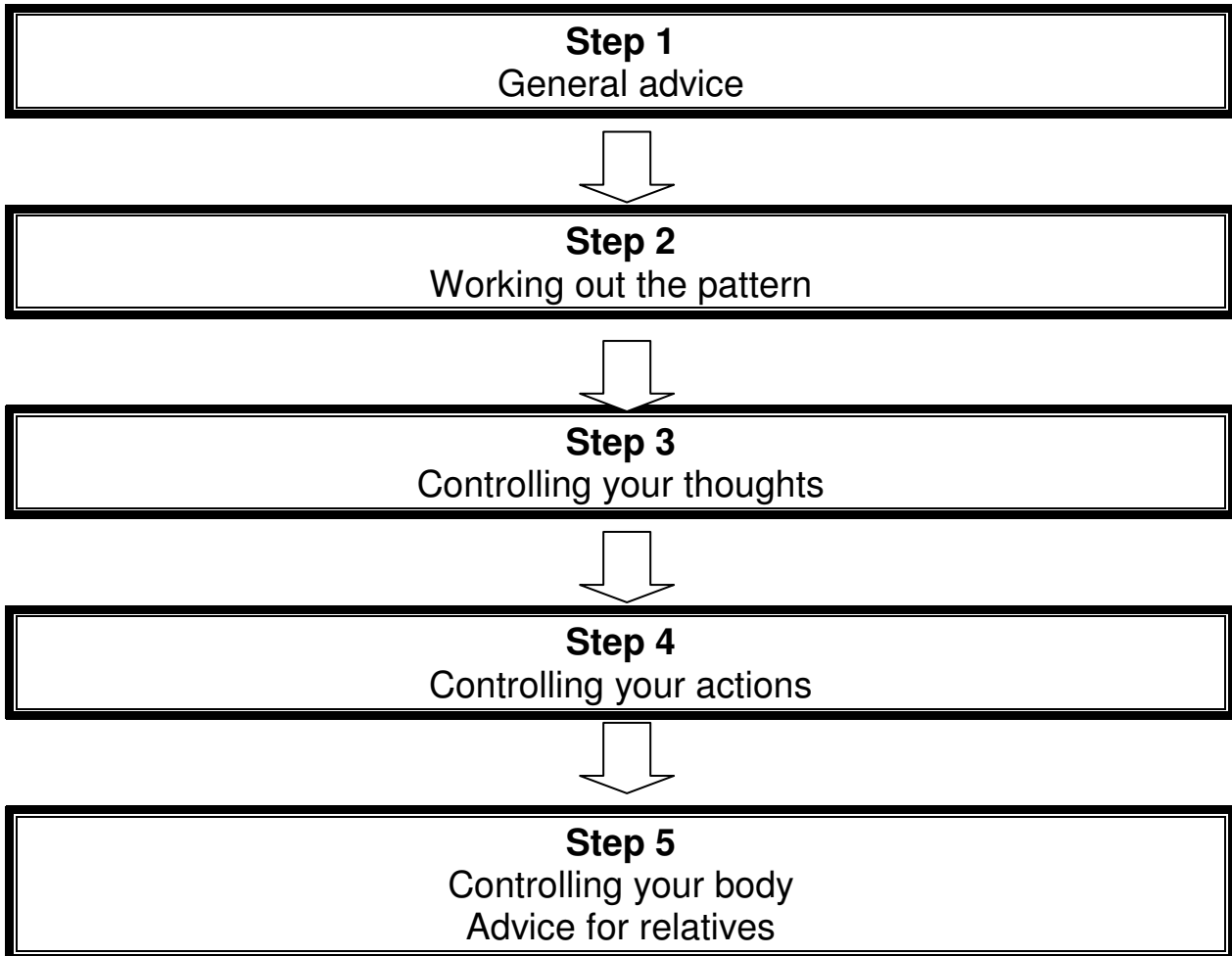
Lack of energy

Tiredness/exhaustion

Never feeling 100%

Aches and pains

## Treatment Section



### **Step 1: General Advice**

As stress is your main problem then treating stress should greatly help control your depression. So make sure you work hard at the advice in the previous sections.

While accepting this, it will still help if you tackle the depression at the same time to speed things up. This handout will offer advice on the most common treatments for depression.

The big problem in depression is the way that you feel it works against you. Your poor concentration may be stopping you picking up what is in this handout. You may feel tired, lack interest and feel that you have no motivation to do anything.

People who are depressed say “*what is the point in trying – nothing works*” and, in response to any suggestion – “*I’ve tried that. It didn’t work*”. Maybe it failed because you tried it **saying** it wouldn’t work.

I know it is easier said than done but you must try to ignore these feelings and give things your best shot. In the following pages, there is advice on ways of tackling your depressed thoughts, depressed actions and depressed body symptoms.

## **Step 2: Working Out The Pattern**

In order to hit your depression as hard as you can, you should first get to know as much as you can about it. In other words, you have to know your enemy. The following questions will help you look at the way depression is affecting you now. Working out the pattern is very important so think long and hard about your answers. If possible, ask those closest to you for their views. They may have knowledge which you do not have.

Once you have completed this form, look over what you have written about your depression. What are your answers telling you? Is there a pattern emerging? Do you have a reason for the depression? Is it kept going by things other than stress? Do you know what makes it better or worse? If so, does it give you any ideas on ways of fighting the depression?

If you have not found any pattern, keep looking to see if you are missing something. As you learn more about depression, come back to these questions again. The more information you have, the better you will be able to fight back.

1	<p><b>Is there a pattern to your depression?</b> Eg; is it worse in the morning, at weekends, at work?</p>
2	<p><b>What things make it worse?</b> Eg; thinking of the past, being alone, being bored, alcohol.</p>
3	<p><b>What things make it better?</b> Eg; being with the family, being busy, talking to friends, exercise.</p>
4	<p><b>What happens to your body when you feel depressed?</b> Eg; feel exhausted, feel ill, aches and pains.</p>
5	<p><b>What kind of thoughts run through your head when you are depressed?</b> Eg; “I’m a failure”, “I’ll never feel better”</p>
6	<p><b>How do you act when you are depressed?</b> Eg; stay in bed, don’t talk, shout at others.</p>



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**What could you do to improve the situation?**

Eg; how can you confront the problems you can tackle and how can you cope with the problems you can't change.

**Problems you can do something about**

**Problems you can't change**

**Use this space to write down anything else you think might help you tackle your depression**

### **Step 3: Controlling Your Thoughts**

As we have seen, the way you talk to yourself is very important in keeping stress and depression going. Look at some of these common thoughts found in people who are depressed:

**I'm worthless**

**Nothing ever works out**

**I hate myself**

**I'm messing up my family**

**I have no future**

**I'm a failure**

**Life is so bleak**

When you are depressed, these thoughts (or thoughts like them) may be running through your mind a good deal of the time. You may not even be aware of these thoughts as they may have become like a bad habit. You may rarely **challenge** the thoughts. You just accept them even if no-one else would believe them about you.

It is no wonder that depression gets a good grip of you if these thoughts are being allowed free rein. Anyone who felt worthless and who thought they would never feel better would feel depressed too. So the first job is to see if these thoughts are true and, if not, to **challenge** them and replace them with more accurate thoughts.

### **How to Challenge Your Thoughts**

The same approach for challenging stressful thoughts can be used to challenge the way we think when we are depressed. This method will have been explained to you in Class 3. The following page shows two examples using the people quoted on page 7 (Susan and Neil).

## **Susan's case**

**The first step** is to write down your thoughts

*"I just can't go on like this. I have no pleasure, everything is a struggle. There is no point in life any more. I've messed things up for everyone. I'm useless. The family would be better off without me".*

**The second step** is to look for evidence **for** the thoughts

*"I know I shouldn't think like this but it is just so hard to do anything about it. I know my husband is sick to death of me and I'm always screaming at my little girl for no reason".*

**The third step** is to look for evidence **against** the thoughts

*"Lets start by accepting the harsh realities – it's true I have very little pleasure these days and, yes, everything is a struggle but I've felt like this before and things did get better. So where do I go from here – life does have meaning – I love my family and they love me (although why I don't know). I'm not useless – I put myself down all the time – others don't. How do I know that they are wrong? Maybe they see things straighter than I do just now. How can I say that the little one would be better off without me. She needs me and I need her".*

**The fourth step** is to sum up all the evidence and use this to challenge your thoughts

*"It's hard to break out of this way of thinking even though I know it isn't the real me saying these things. I know I'm not easy to live with just now but things can change – hang in there. I was never the most confident person in the world but I have coped in the past so I can cope again".*

## **Neil's case**

### **First step**

*"I feel dead inside. No wonder I lost that job – I'm just a failure. Life will never change, I'm just wasting your time when you will have people waiting to see you who deserve help a lot more than I do".*

### **Second step**

*"I've lost jobs before so I'll lose them again. This must be my own fault – if I really wanted to get better I would. Maybe I am just lazy".*

### **Third step**

*"I'm a brickie in the building trade – getting laid off is part of the game. The whole squad got laid off last time so it's hardly all my fault. I don't have any energy and I can't build up any enthusiasm to get going. But depression makes me feel this way – not the other way about and how do I know that life will never change – I'm not a clairvoyant".*

### **Fourth step**

*"Accept that life is never going to be rosy all the time and there isn't security in my job but I don't have any great options. I know the drink doesn't help so if I give it up, or at least, cut down, I'll feel better. And if you feel that I'm not a waste of time then I'll accept it even though I may not be able to see your view of me right now".*

Catching and challenging thoughts will be a struggle for a while. Keep at it. Keep challenging these thoughts which are keeping your depression alive.

## **Step 4: Controlling Your Actions**

Depression often makes you stop doing things you did in the past because of lack of energy, lack of enthusiasm, fear etc. You may now feel that you are not doing anything useful. You may feel overwhelmed at the prospect of doing things which, in the past, would have been easy to do. This may now be part of the problem.

## Activity Diary

As a first step, you should keep an **Activity Diary** to see what you **are** doing. If you are doing more than you thought, you should feel better. If you are not doing much, you can use it to note the goals you have set yourself. The aim of planning activities is to help you feel you are part of the world again and not standing on the sidelines. It will show you that you are fighting back.

Look at doing straight-forward things like phoning a friend, taking the children to the park, going to the pictures. In the first instance, you only need to **do** it. You don't need to enjoy it or do it well. This can come later. So if your goal is to clean the living room window, it doesn't have to be perfectly cleaned. If you have cleaned it then you have done what you set out to do. So a pat on the back is in order.

The Activity Diary is in the class handouts. Before you start, you have to think up things to do. When you do that thing, you should write it into the diary. The box below tells you what you should do.

### Keeping Your Diary

**Write** down the date.

**Write** down what you did.

### Coping

Give yourself a score relating to how well you **coped** using a scale from 1 to 10 where 10 would mean you coped really well, a score of 7 says you coped pretty good, and a score of 1 that you messed it up completely.

Put your score in the **cope** column.

### Enjoyment

Give yourself a score related to how much you **enjoyed** it using the same 1 – 10 scale where 10 would mean you loved it, and 1 meaning you got nothing at all from doing it.

Put your score in the **enjoy** column.

## Hints on filling out the diary

- **Keep your goals specific** – ‘weed the rose garden for half an hour’ rather than ‘do some gardening’; ‘hoover the hall’ rather than ‘do some housework’.
- **Keep your goals realistic** – Don’t aim to ‘be back at work next week’ if you have been off for six months. ‘Fix the plug on the lamp’ rather than ‘decorate the house’. Walk before you can run.
- **Don’t worry if your plans get knocked out** – if someone asks you to, eg; go to the football when you had planned to weed the rose garden, go to the football – do the weeding the next day.
- **Remember that your only goal is to do it.** Don’t worry if you don’t enjoy it or find it hard to cope with. Those things can come later.
- **Don’t be put off on a bad day.** The key to overcoming depression is learning to do things (even something small) even when you feel low. If you wait to feel better then the depression is controlling you. When you feel bad, really go for your goals. If you fail, don’t despair – stand back, see where you went wrong. Did you bite off more than you could chew? Did you handle things badly? Learn from your mistakes. If you succeed on a bad day, you have taken a big step forward.
- **Try not to worry about where you will find the energy from:** **Not** doing things will tire you a lot more than **doing** them. Activity and exercise actually **give** you energy.
- **Ask others to help decide on goals.** Apart from useful advice, your family and friends will feel involved in your treatment and will be there to pat your back when you succeed.
- **Read over your diary every night.** How did you get on today? What did you learn? What will you do tomorrow?

The first two lines in the Activity Diary are completed to give you an idea of how to do it.

### Activity Diary (1)

Date	What Did You Do	Cope	Enjoy
EXAMPLE 1 Monday	Put the television off. Got my coat on and took the dog for a 10 minute walk in the park. Brooded a bit on my problems but it was good to get out of the house for a while.	7	4
EXAMPLE 2 Tuesday	Took my son to the toddlers group instead of relying on my mum to do it. I felt I didn't have much to talk about to the other mums but no-one seemed to notice. He seemed pleased that I had taken him.	5	3

## Activity Diary (2)

Date	What Did You Do	Cope	Enjoy

## **Step 5: Controlling Your Body**

Hopefully you will find that the relaxation CD you were given earlier in the course is useful. Managing the physical signs of stress is a really good way to manage depression as well so keep using it regularly.

There is growing interest in exercise as a way to combat depression. It may be that **aerobic** exercise is particularly good for this.

Aerobic activity refers to any exercise which burns up oxygen so things like dancing, swimming, walking, jogging, and badminton are aerobic exercises. Stretching and strengthening exercises, on the other hand, are not aerobic. These types of exercise are obviously still good for you but it is specifically aerobic exercise that has been found to be helpful in the management of depression.

Before starting on an exercise course, you should consult your GP who will advise you on what things to try and what level to start at. Advice and fitness tests are also available at some sports centres.

It is fine if you want to go for walks alone but you should think about joining an exercise group as this would offer social contact as well. So you would benefit in two ways at the same time.

### **Advice for relatives/friends**

#### **Your problems**

Living with someone who is depressed can be a terrible trial. Nothing you suggested is acted on. You may bear the brunt of the person's irritation, even aggression. The house may start to revolve around the person. You may feel you are treading on eggshells all the time.

You may feel helpless in the face of this problem. Rows, marital problems, problems with the children are common. You may find yourself blamed unfairly for the depression.

#### **Get the expectations right**

It is important that you don't expect perfection from yourself. You may lose your temper; you may think or say wounding and hurtful things; you may consider leaving. You are only human. Accept that you can't

always be perfect but then try to control your own irritation, anger and criticism as much as you can.

## **What can you do?**

### **Learn about depression**

Read this handout from cover to cover. Make sure that you understand what depression is about and how the treatment works.

### **Understand what depression feels like**

Don't provide sympathy – provide *empathy*. This means trying to understand what your loved one is going through. It may be that your own nature doesn't allow you to understand what depression is like. Even so, let your loved one know that you accept that this is a real problem which won't respond to a good kick up the backside.

### **Take an active part in the treatment**

Keep talking. Be an ally. When your partner's motivation plummets and he/she wants to give up, shoulder the burden to keep things going. Always be there for your loved one. Lend a shoulder to cry on. Give your view of things. Discuss the way he/she sees the situation and offer your views. They may not be right but it lets the partner see that there is usually more than one way to perceive anything.

Although it will be very useful if you help as much as possible, you should make sure that your partner takes responsibility for his/her own treatment. Your job is to act as the back-up.

### **Cope with set-backs**

If something goes wrong, don't criticise. Talk it over, work out why it didn't work and plan ways of coping next time.

Your partner may be put off easily and feel like giving up. You will have to get them going again. This will not be easy. Use all your skills to avoid hurting your loved one when you do this.

## **Advice for yourself**

Just as depression is often caused by more than one thing, treatment may involve more than one approach. Controlling stress, challenging your thoughts, activity diaries, and physical exercise all may have a part to play. You have to work out what approaches suit you best.

Getting over depression, like getting over stress, is a hard battle. Be prepared for set-backs; be prepared for wanting to give up.

You are aiming to see some light at the end of the tunnel. Once you see that light, keep heading for it – it will slowly get bigger and brighter. As it does, the number of good days will increase, the number of bad days decrease. Bear this progress in mind when things seem grim.

Once you feel you are getting on top of the depression, you should look back to see if any of the factors which caused the depression could do so again in the future. Are there problems in your marriage/relationship? Problems with the children? Problems at work? Do you expect too much from yourself? Are you running yourself into the ground trying to do too much? If you identify any obvious problems, face up to them before they can start causing damage again.

Keep working hard and

**Good Luck**

