

### What is Depression?

Depression is a common illness, which will affect one in five people during their lifetime. It can involve feelings of hopelessness, tiredness, low self-esteem, sleeping problems and physical aches and pains.

People who have depression often experience panic attacks too.

### What is a panic attack?

Panic attacks are characterised by sudden feelings of overwhelming panic and fear, accompanied by a racing heart, breathlessness, fear, nausea, sweating, shaking and dizziness. This can be frightening, especially if you don't understand what is happening to you. By recognising the early signs of a panic attack and learning a few techniques to deal with them you will be able to control the attacks and potentially get rid of them altogether.

### Why am I having a panic attack?

We respond to stressful situations by producing hormones called adrenaline and noradrenaline. These are also known as our 'fight or flight' hormones as they prepare us to deal with dangerous situations by increasing the heart rate, increasing respiration, slowing down digestion and tensing muscles. If we produce too many of these stress hormones then instead of enhancing our performance they can interfere.

Once the stressful situation has passed the levels of hormones should become normal again quite quickly. However, if the 'fight or flight' response isn't appropriate to the situation, for example when you are in an overcrowded, noisy shop then the effects of the hormones continue and you may have a panic attack.

### Dealing with a panic attack

Many of the symptoms of a panic attack are caused by hyperventilating – breathing quickly and shallowly – which increases the amount of oxygen in the blood and decreases the levels of carbon dioxide. In this situation it helps to control your breathing by taking slow, deeper breaths. Your GP will be able to advise you of other techniques to stop hyperventilation.

Having panic attacks is nothing to be ashamed of but if you are in a busy place or with friends it can be difficult to know what to do. Some people find it easier to say that they feel faint and need to sit quietly for a minute. Once you have recovered it is easier to explain what has happened. Being open with those around you means that the next time it happens they will know what to do.

Panic attacks can be a vicious circle. If you associate certain places or situations with panic attacks you have had before then they may become triggers for other attacks.

### Preventing a Panic Attack

Learning more about panic attacks will help remove some of the fear. Dealing with any underlying issues which may be causing the panic attacks may remove the triggers. Your GP will be able to give you further advice on talking treatments and medication. There is also a lot you can do yourself by learning breathing and relaxation techniques.

Learning to relax is not easy but if you practise regularly then you will be able to use the techniques at the first signs of an attack or when you are in a situation that would normally cause an attack. Your local library will have information on relaxation techniques and may also have tapes you can borrow.

### Useful Organisations

No Panic  
0808 808 0545  
(10am – 10pm every day)

Saneline  
08457 678 000  
www.sane.org.uk  
(Open 12pm – 2am every day)

NHS Direct  
0845 46 47  
www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk  
(Open 24 hours)

### Contact Us

I would like to support the work of Depression Alliance.

Please accept my gift of £

I would like Depression Alliance to claim the tax back on this donation, and on any subsequent donation I make.

For every donation you make to us, we can now claim back the tax paid (equivalent to 28p in every pound), provided you pay an equal amount of income tax or capital gains tax. Please tick the box above if you would like to make your money go even further at no extra cost to you.\*

I would like to become a member of Depression Alliance and enclose my membership fee of (please tick relevant box):

£10 (full-fee)  £5 (unwaged/OAP/student)  
 £20 (company rate)  £15 (European rate)  
 £20 (International rate)

I would like to find out more about Depression Alliance

I would like to pay

By cheque\*\*/postal order for £

By card, please deduct £  from my:  
 MasterCard  CAF card  
 VISA card

### PLEASE COMPLETE IN BLOCK CAPITALS

Name as written on card

Card No

Exp date

Signature  Date

Title

Forename

Surname

Address

Postcode

E-mail

Please return this form in an envelope to: Depression Alliance, 35, Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7JB

■ Data protection: From time to time, we will write with details about our work. Please tick this box if you would prefer not to hear from us. Your details will never be passed onto to any third party without your prior consent.

\* You must pay an amount of income tax (and/or capital gains tax) which is at least equal to the value of what we claim back in that tax year (currently 28p for every pound you give in that tax year). If you pay tax at a higher rate, you can claim further tax relief in your Self Assessment return.

\*\* Please make cheques payable to Depression Alliance

- A panic attack can be extremely frightening but it will pass
- No one has ever died from a panic attack
- You can learn to control panic attacks

### Depression Alliance

Depression Alliance is the leading UK charity for people affected by depression. We work to relieve this treatable condition by providing information, support and understanding. We also campaign to raise awareness amongst the general public about the realities of depression.

Depression Alliance coordinates a national network of self-help groups so that people with depression can share experiences and coping strategies with others in similar situations.

For more information about self-help groups in your area, as well as our other services for people affected by depression, please complete the form overleaf.



Depression Alliance  
35 Westminster Bridge Road  
London  
SE1 7JB



Depression Alliance Scotland  
3 Grosvenor Gardens  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5JU



Depression Alliance Cymru  
11 Plas Melin  
Westbourne Ave  
Whitchurch  
Cardiff  
CF14 2BT

You can also contact us via our main number 0845 123 23 20. You will automatically be directed to the relevant regional office, and all calls will be charged at the local rate.

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)  
[information@depressionalliance.org](mailto:information@depressionalliance.org)

Registered charity 1096741.  
A Company Limited by Guarantee 4253700  
(Registered office at the London address)  
© Depression Alliance 2003. All rights reserved.



## Depression affects one in five of us at some point in our life

## People affected by depression often experience panic attacks too, don't worry – you are not alone.



If you are worried about a friend or relative who is depressed, Depression Alliance can help.