

## ***Depression and Antidepressants***

We all have times when we are unhappy, but for some people there is a stage beyond this called Depression. Clinical Depression is a particular term doctors use to mean a period of at least two weeks [but often much longer] when your mood is very low, you are very tired and you are unable to enjoy things you would normally do. Very simply, stress and unhappiness are things that can pass with time and we have some control over, but in Clinical Depression people have gone past the point where they can help themselves and need help from other sources. Up to 10% of people will have a significant episode of depression at some point in their life.

### **The stages of depression:**

- 1. Warning signs – headaches, poor sleep**
- 2. Using up favours – arguments, ‘bad luck’**
- 3. Burnout – tiredness, fatigue, irritability**
- 4. Breakdown – things really stop working**

There are a number of things that are helpful when people are Clinically Depressed. If someone is towards the more mild end of the spectrum [but still severe for them!], then talking therapies may be helpful. This can be face-to-face with a therapist, or from a book or website. One is mentioned below.

If things get more severe – perhaps to the point where the person is unable to leave the house or has severe suicidal ideas – talking will not be enough as they will be unable to even see a small chink of light at the end of the tunnel. If this is the case, they may need medication or even a short period of time in hospital. Hopelessness is one of the most worrying symptoms – people can struggle along as long as they have hope. This would be a good time to see your GP. Don’t worry – most GPs will not reach for the prescription pad straight away and will have a range of suggestions. They will also be sensitive to your faith. They may ask you to see a psychiatrist or psychologist at the hospital, but this is much more rare.

### **Christians and Antidepressants**

Clinical Depression is an illness and so it is perfectly possible for a Christian to be depressed in exactly the same way as it is possible for you to break your leg. Similarly, though God does heal some physical illnesses with miracles, most will also get better with modern medicine. Why should antidepressants be any different?

Depression will affect your faith and how you relate to others and church, but so will a chronic physical illness. It doesn’t mean your faith is weak or that you have committed some horrible sin. In fact, if you are wondering if you have committed some “unforgivable sin” the chances are that you haven’t!

Antidepressants should be taken for an initial six-week period to see if they work [set expectations for them: e.g., improve your sleep, energy levels or libido] and, if they do work, they should be continued to at least another six months. Do NOT be tempted to stop them early. They are not addictive like heroin or alcohol, but should be stopped slowly under medical supervision – like any medicine.

### **A task to complete**



Take an online screening scale for depression. A good example is something called the ‘PHQ-9’ which is copyright free and can easily be found on the Internet.

**\*\* If you score 10 or more you may have clinical depression and should see your GP \*\***