

### Working to relieve the pressure!

The symptoms of IIH can be very debilitating and disabling for some people. When faced with a long term condition, pain and other symptoms which affect your day to day life can limit the things you can do. It is natural to feel low, frustrated and angry - all of these sorts of feelings are normal.

#### Feeling low or depressed?

Normal everyday depression can last for a few minutes to a few days. We have all felt these periods of being 'down' or 'sad', but clinical depression is a prolonged and persistent negative mood which can interfere with many aspects of your life. Even if you are not 'clinically' depressed, the demands a long-term condition such as IIH puts on you, both physically and emotionally, can be very draining.



#### Symptoms of depression

##### Emotional

The emotional symptoms of depression can include an inability to experience pleasure, feelings of sadness, guilt, helplessness and/or hopelessness, self-critical thoughts, thoughts of suicide or self-harm, and feeling isolated. Depression doesn't just affect us emotionally though. Behavioural changes and physical symptoms can also be manifestations of depression.

##### Behavioural

Behavioural symptoms of depression can include crying for no apparent reason, withdrawal from other people and new situations, getting angry easily, loss of interest in your appearance, and losing interest in activities which were once of interest.

##### Physical

Mental health and physical health are closely linked, and some of the physical symptoms of depression can include anxiety, impaired concentration, sleep disturbance or sleeping too much or too little or feeling fatigued, loss of appetite and interest in food, loss of sexual desire, and weight loss or gain.

Depression is a medical illness that even the strongest person can't overcome without help. Our psychological well-being and physical well-being are closely related - physical illness can lead to depression, and depression affects our ability to cope with physical illness. Clinical depression is a very common illness that affects approximately 3-5% of the population at any one time. There is a 20% chance of having an episode of clinical depression at some point in one's life, but it's readily treatable with counselling and/or medication.

#### Things to remember

- It's not your fault that you have developed IIH
- It is entirely normal to feel frustrated, angry, depressed etc. when you have to cope with life in general and a long term illness - it is not a sign of weakness
- You are not alone - if symptoms of depression persist, get professional help
- Talk to a friend, a relative - being open with others by sharing your thoughts and feelings can make you feel less isolated

#### Overcoming depression and regain a positive outlook

At times it may seem like an impossible task to get out of depression and start living normally again, but there are some things that can help you to on the road back to regaining your life. Try to accept that although you have IIH you can be optimistic about the future.

- Try to replace negative thoughts with positive ideas.
- Focus on your positive experiences.
- Make a weekly list of your positive achievements.
- Maintain contact with your friends.
- Find a hobby to distract you. If you can't do your hobbies because of your symptoms, try to find alternatives. For example if you love reading but your vision is affected by IIH, get audio books from your local library.
- Try to do some exercise within the limits of your symptoms, even if it's only walking a short distance every day.

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- Use self-relaxation techniques when you feel tense, for example, slowly breathe in and out for several minutes.
- Set realistic goals.
- Remember that everyone has different abilities - focus on your unique characteristics and positive achievements.
- Create a list of things you can do to help you feel better when you feel overwhelmed - think of things that have worked in the past.
- Don't be afraid to laugh and have fun - set aside time for you, alone or with others.

### Thoughts of suicide

Sometimes when everything gets too much, it can feel as though you can't go on any more, but there are things that you should remember and do that will help:

- Suicidal thoughts are a sign you want your life to be different - not that you don't want life at all.
- Avoid dangerous situations. (Alcohol is dangerous because it depresses your control and affects your judgment).
- Reach out to the safest person you can find - let them know how you're feeling and that you need to talk.
- Think of a time you felt really good about yourself, a success, a time you helped someone else - how you've been down before and got up again.
- Pamper yourself - warm baths/showers, a good book, music with positive associations. Tell yourself, "I deserve this".
- Write down your thoughts and feelings in a private diary.
- Accept attention, support, praise and rewards - you may be pushing people and good things away.
- Try to solve problems from day to day so worries don't mount up any higher than they are now. That way you'll feel more in control of your life.

### Where to find help



Don't be afraid to ask for professional help. Talk to someone close to you, someone you can trust. Tell your doctor how you're feeling. In a crisis helplines such as the Samaritans can help, they are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call them on **116123** or visit their website <http://www.samaritans.org/>

**Never be afraid to ask for professional help.**

Sometimes it helps to talk to people who have similar experiences to you. There are support groups in some areas, and groups on the internet where you can 'talk' to people with IIH. IIH UK have regional groups on Facebook where members can organise meet ups. Having other people to talk to who know just what you are going through can help you to get through the hard times.