

Rover

DEPRESSION SUPPORT NEWSLETTER



If you're genuinely worried about someone, organise a group of close friends or family members to make some sort of contact each day. It can be to help out, have a coffee or simply to say hello.

Illustration by Matthew Johnstone



Rover is a Support Newsletter published four times a year for people who are touched by the black dog of depression and those who care for them. It is endorsed and supported by the Black Dog Institute at Randwick. Most of the content of each newsletter comes from readers who post in or email their own ideas and suggestions for managing their depression.

Welcome to the spring edition of Rover. October is Mental Health Month and this year the theme was "Wellbeing: Invest in Your Life". It recognises that a person's overall wellbeing can include not just their mental health, but also their physical health, social health, spiritual health and community health. Events were being organised all over NSW – from expos on wellbeing to tai chi demonstrations.

Please send in your strategies and articles for future editions of Rover. We are giving away one of the following books for every submission published. Choose between:

- Journeys with the Black Dog: Inspirational stories of bringing depression to heel
- Tracking the Black Dog: Hairy tales and historical legwork from the Black Dog
- Tackling Depression at Work: A practical guide for employees and managers
- Navigating Teenage Depression: A guide for parents and professionals or
- Mastering Bipolar Disorder: An insider's guide to managing mood swings and finding balance

Please keep articles to 500 words or less. (See box this page for how to get them to us). We look forward to reading them!

Nerida, on behalf of the Volunteer Committee

HELP US FILL FUTURE EDITIONS OF ROVER

Do you have something to contribute to our newsletter? We would like to receive your comments or ideas, stories or tips. Perhaps you would like to share your journey with depression.

You can email them to us at blackdog@blackdog.org.au (type in 'Rover' as the subject)

Or you can post them to:
Rover Newsletter
Black Dog Institute,
Hospital Road, Randwick NSW 2031

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."

Helen Keller

FOR YOUR FREE SUBSCRIPTION TO ROVER...

Ph: 02 9382 4523. Rover can also be accessed online at www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
Type **Rover** in the search bar.



Hi my name is Trish. I'm 59, divorced with one daughter. I would like to thank you for a great publication. I found Rover in my local library and now have a subscription. I keep every edition in a folder and go back and reread the articles from it regularly. I like the Silver Lining stories and I would like to share mine with your readers.

I have been prone to depression since my divorce and have taken antidepressants on and off since then. I was also diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes six years ago, which has contributed to my depression. It was a point made in an article in Rover about how exercise can be as effective as antidepressants for older people that inspired me to give exercise a go.

Have you heard of the Zumba craze? It's exercising using dance moves and I recently started classes at a community centre with other 'mature ladies'. I used to be a pretty good dancer in my youth (!) and found that I took to it straight away. I've also lost a couple of kilos. Through my efforts to help keep the Black Dog at bay, I have discovered something so enjoyable. I'd forgotten what it felt like to have so much fun! AND my doctor tells me I no longer have diabetes. This news has raised my self-esteem. These days, I have a more positive outlook on life.

Send in your Silver Lining story!

NO BOUNDARIES

Well-known Australian sports people who have talked about their experience with depression;

- ✓ Petria Thomas OAM – Olympic gold medallist swimmer
- ✓ Geoff Huegill – World champion swimmer
- ✓ Pat Cash – Wimbledon champion
- ✓ John Konrads – Former Olympic Swimming champion

ha ha

Two psychiatrists pass in the hall. The first says, "Hello."

The other thinks, "I wonder what he meant by that."

“Remember this too shall pass”

is a phrase you may have heard from time to time that illustrates the idea that all things, negative or positive, are temporary. Its origins are not that well known, however it is often attributed to King Solomon as in the story below ~

King Solomon, feeling blue, asked his advisors to find him a ring he had once seen in a dream. "When I feel satisfied I'm afraid that it won't last. And when I don't, I am afraid my sorrow will go on forever. Find me the ring that will ease my suffering," he demanded.

Solomon sent out all of his advisors, and eventually one of them met an old jeweller who carved into a simple gold band the inscription, "This too shall pass." When the king received his ring and read the inscription, his sorrows turned to joy and his joy to sorrows, and then both gave way to equanimity.

(Reference: Mental Health Association NSW)



Tips for Staying Well

- Find a glimmer of hope and swim towards it.
- Play some music. It may raise your mood and asks nothing in return.
- Recovery begins with understanding. Gaining intimate understanding of your enemy will provide you with weapons to destroy it.
- Appreciate the simple things in life.
- Be aware of the company you keep.
- Schedule in fun times.
- Listen to ABC talks. Grow roses. Keep a cat.
- Write lists of tasks. Plan for your days- this gives something to look forward to, some guiding purpose, a sense of accomplishment
- Do not go through the journey to wellness alone. Do not rely on one strategy alone.
- Recite the litany: *It will pass.*

(Reference: Contributors to Journeys with the Black Dog: Inspirational Stories of Bringing Depression to Heel)



What is R U OK? Day?

www.ruokday.com.au

RUOK day is a national day of action that aims to prevent suicide by encouraging Australians to connect with someone they care about and help stop little problems turning into big ones.

The idea for R U O K? Day was inspired by the death of Barry Larkin. Barry Larkin (1940 – 1995) was a father of three sons and a successful business management consultant who sadly took his own life. R U O K? Day is dedicated to Barry and all those in Australia and around the world who have died through suicide, and to the family and friends who loved them.

How to start a R U OK? conversation

Keeping in touch with others is crucial for our health and wellbeing. Feeling isolated or hopeless can contribute to depression and other mental illnesses, which can ultimately result in suicide. Regular, meaningful conversations can protect those we know and love. Here are some helpful pointers to help you connect with someone you think may be doing it tough.

1. Ask R U OK?

- Start a general conversation somewhere private.
- Build trust through good eye contact, open and relaxed body language.
- Ask open-ended questions to discuss concerns based on their behaviour.

2. Listen without judgement

- Guide the conversation with caring questions.
- The more they talk the better. A problem shared is a problem halved.
- Don't rush to solve problems for them. It is better to have a full understanding of the issues.
- Listen to the person without judging them as lazy or weak. They are trying to cope as best they can.
- Don't give advice like "cheer up" or "pull yourself together" or "you'll be right mate".
- It is important to let them know that it is good they are discussing it.

3. Encourage action

- Summarise the issues and ask them what they plan to do.
- Encourage them to take one step, such as see their doctor.
- It is essential to follow up. Nothing changes until someone acts.

4. Follow up

- People who are really struggling often find it difficult to take action. Therefore, it is very important to follow up on how they are going.
- Put a note in your diary to call them in one week. If they are desperate, follow up with them sooner.
- Ask if they have managed to take that first step and see someone.



DEALING WITH DENIAL?

- If they deny the problem, do not criticize them. Acknowledge they are not ready to talk.
- Say you are still concerned about changes in their behaviour.
- Ask if you can enquire again next week if there is no improvement.

(Reference: <http://www.ruokday.com.au/content/how-to-start-a-ruok-conversation.aspx>)

Carers NSW – (02) 9289 4249 – offers confidential support for relatives and friends of people with depression, bipolar disorder or other mental health problems.



Interested? Black Dog Institute Temperament & Personality Questionnaire

The questionnaire will be of interest to anybody who wishes to gain some feedback on their personality styles, and to learn how personality styles may be associated with depression.

Research at the Black Dog Institute has identified the following personality styles:

- | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ✓ Anxious Worrying | ✓ Irritable | ✓ Self-critical | ✓ Rejection Sensitive |
| ✓ Self-focused | ✓ Perfectionist | ✓ Socially avoidant | ✓ Personally reserved |

The questionnaire consists of 109 questions and takes around 10 minutes to complete. When you have finished the questionnaire anonymously, you will be provided with your scores and some brief information about each personality scale.

Find the questionnaire at www.blackdoginstitute.org.au. Click on *Do a self-test* on the Home page then click *Temperament and Personality Questionnaire*.



October 12 has been named *Stress Less Day*

Here are some hints to avoid harmful stress



- 1 Work out priorities** - Keep a list - make the tasks possible. Prioritise the tasks in order of importance and tick off when done. Include the important people in your life as priorities and attend to these relationships.
- 2 Identify your stress situations** - Make a list of events that leave you emotionally drained, with one or two ways to reduce the stress for each. When they occur, use them as an opportunity to practise your stress reduction techniques, then, keep notes on what works for next time.
- 3 Learn to 'reframe' statements: Don't react to imagined insults** - It is a waste of time and energy to be oversensitive to imagined insults, innuendo or sarcasm. Give people the benefit of the doubt, talk over the situation with someone you trust. They may have another spin on what was said.
- 4 Think before you commit yourself to other people's expectations** - We can often perform tasks merely to feel accepted by other people. Practice saying "no" to requests that are unreasonable or more than you can handle at the time - rather than suffer subsequent regrets and stress. Consider whether you should learn to rely less on the approval of others. Again, talk this over with someone you trust.
- 5 Move on: Don't dwell on past mistakes** - Feelings of guilt, remorse and regret cannot change the past and they make the present difficult by sapping your energy. Make a conscious effort to do something to change the mood (eg mindfulness technique or something active you enjoy) when you feel yourself drifting into regrets about past actions. Learn from it and have strategies in place for next time. Learn to forgive yourself for past mistakes.
- 6 Learn to defuse anger and frustrations rather than bottle them up** - Express and discuss your feelings to the person responsible for your agitation. If it is impossible to talk it out, plan for some physical activity at the end of the working day to relieve tensions. Let go of grudges –they do not affect the potential victim because he does not necessarily know about them. However, the grudge-bearer pays a price in energy and anxiety just thinking about revenge.
- 7 Set aside time each day for recreation and exercise** - Gentle repetitive exercise such as walking, swimming, cycling are good to relieve stress. Meditation, yoga, pilates and dance are also excellent. The trick is to find what suits you best. Hobbies that focus attention are also good stress relievers. Take up a new activity unrelated to your current occupation, one that gives you a sense of achievement and satisfaction. Establish new friends in your newly found interest.
- 8 Take your time: don't let people rush you** - Frenzied activities lead to errors, regrets, stress. Request time to orient yourself to the situation. At work, if rushed, ask people to wait until you finish working or thinking something out. Plan ahead to arrive at appointments early, composed and having made allowances for unexpected hold-ups. Practice approaching situations 'mindfully'.

(Reference: Written by Kay Wilhelm: some material adapted from 'Hints to Avoid or Manage Stress' (National Heart Foundation) and 'Ten Hints to Avoid Stress' (Mental Health Foundation). Accessed on the Black Dog Institute website.)

Jo's journey with Post Natal Depression

Jo is the mother of two boys aged nine and six. It wasn't until Jo's first son was 18 months old that she was diagnosed with postnatal depression. She says that although she didn't realise at the time, she had problems during pregnancy. "I was working in a demanding job until a couple of weeks before my son was born. I realised later that my stress levels were high and that I had been experiencing anxiety," she said. Jo was due to return to work after six months, but when the time came she felt she couldn't go back, but she says she didn't ask herself why she felt that way. With a husband working long hours and her parents living in another city, Jo says she didn't have a lot of contact with people. "I tried to exercise, but I found it hard. I tried a mothers' group, but I didn't make any friends. So I spent a lot of time with my baby wandering around the local shopping centre." When she finally returned to work after twelve months, she said her career took off, but it wasn't a smooth ride.



"The work - mother - wife balance wasn't working. I was being unreasonable. I knew something wasn't right, but I didn't know what." Eventually, Jo made an appointment with a psychologist through the Employee Assistance Program where she worked....and 18 months after her son was born, she was diagnosed with postnatal depression.

Jo says counselling led to her recovery, but she says people shouldn't rule out medication if it's needed. Her advice for other women who may be struggling: "If someone asks you if you're OK, think about it and answer honestly. Be true to how you're feeling and if you think you need help, get onto it straight away."

Send in your journey with depression!

(Reference: beyondblue - http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=94.1227.)

November 13 – 19 is Postnatal Depression Awareness Week.

For information on Post and Antenatal depression, visit PANDA on www.panda.org.au or call 1300 726 306

