



**ITEC**



**VTCT**

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# Unit Specification

UMH4 – Understanding depression

Unit reference number: R/618/6284

**Level: 2**

**Guided Learning (GL) hours: 9**

## Overview

Learners will develop an understanding of depression. Learners will explore what is meant by the term depression, the possible causes and the impact that depression has on the individual and others. Learners will also explore the management and support options that are available for people suffering from depression.

## Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit, learners will:

LO1 Understand depression

LO2 Understand the causes of depression

LO3 Understand how depression affects individuals and others

LO4 Understand how to manage and support people experiencing depression

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# Unit content

## LO1 Understand depression

### Know the difference between depression and psychotic depression

#### Taught content

- Depression can be described as a feeling of low mood that lasts for an extended period of time and that can affect your everyday life (Mind 2018)
- This should be differentiated from feeling 'low'. In cases such as these, where there are temporary feelings of sadness, frustration or stress, a person may be experiencing the 'ups and downs' of everyday life
- Depression that is persistent, lasting for weeks or months rather than just a few days, is sometimes referred to as 'clinical' depression. In addition, a person who is experiencing depression will find it difficult to function on a daily basis
- Some people's depression can be so severe that they experience hallucinations and delusional thinking. These symptoms associated with depression are known as 'psychotic' depression
  - Delusions and hallucinations are symptoms of psychosis
  - Psychosis will be explored later within this qualification

### Know the signs and symptoms of depression

#### Taught content

- Symptoms of general low mood may include:
  - Feeling sad
  - Feeling anxious
  - Feeling more tired than usual
  - Feeling angry or frustrated
  - Low self-esteem and confidence
  - Low mood that lasts for two weeks or more may be a sign of depression or clinical depression
  - <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/feelings-symptoms-behaviours/feelings-and-symptoms/low-mood-sadness-depression/>
- Symptoms of depression can be largely separated into psychological, physical and social symptoms
  - Psychological symptoms
    - continuous low mood or sadness
    - feeling hopeless and helpless
    - having low self-esteem
    - feeling tearful
    - feeling guilt-ridden
    - feeling irritable and intolerant of others
    - having no motivation or interest in things
    - finding it difficult to make decisions
    - not getting any enjoyment out of life
    - feeling anxious or worried

- having suicidal thoughts
- thoughts of self-harm
- Physical symptoms
  - moving or speaking more slowly than usual
  - changes in appetite or weight
  - constipation
  - unexplained aches and pains
  - lack of energy
  - loss of libido
  - changes to menstrual cycle
  - disturbed sleep
- Social symptoms
  - avoiding contact with friends
  - taking part in fewer social activities
  - neglecting hobbies and interests
  - difficulties with relationships:
    - home, work, family or other

### Know the factors associated with psychotic depression

#### Taught content

- The causes of psychotic depression are not always fully understood and there may be situations where there are no identifiable causes. It is important to realise that there are a number of triggers related to depression and people respond differently to these triggers
- People with psychotic depression may experience psychosis leading to
  - Delusions – false thoughts or beliefs about any particular situation
  - Hallucinations – hearing, feeling, smelling, seeing or tasting things that are not there, e.g. hearing voices
  - These psychotic responses are often related to their depressed state, e.g. hearing voices that relate to their body image
- People with psychotic depression are also known to suffer from ‘psychomotor agitation’ or ‘psychomotor retardation’
  - Psychomotor agitation – inability to relax, constantly fidgeting
  - Psychomotor retardation – a slowing down of thoughts and movements
- Individuals with psychotic depression are at much higher risk of experiencing suicidal thoughts or self-harm than those with depression

## LO2 Understand the causes of depression

### Know the triggers and life demands that could lead to people developing depression

#### Taught content

- There is no single cause of depression and different causes may combine to lead to a downward spiral of events leading to depression. Some of the reasons people develop depression include:
  - Stressful life events – bereavement, divorce, job loss. Many people with psychotic depression will have experienced childhood adversity
  - Family history – there may be a propensity toward depression if a family member, such as parent, brother or sister, has previously suffered from depression. This also extends to the genetic links to personality, where some personality traits such as low self-esteem can make you more vulnerable to depression
  - Post-natal depression – see section on post-natal depression
  - Loneliness
  - Alcohol and drugs – alcohol is a depressant and can increase the symptoms of depression. Some people turn to alcohol and drugs to deal with depression, but this can result in a spiralling effect on depression
  - Gender – women are twice as likely to develop depression as men (Salk et.al, 2018). Women are also more likely to suffer from severe depression
  - Illness
    - Longstanding illnesses or diseases increase the risk of depression
    - Head injuries can lead to alterations of emotions and mood
    - Hormone imbalances, e.g. underactive thyroid, can cause symptoms that lead to depression
- The stresses of everyday life can contribute to depression. These stresses, in conjunction with depression, can make it even more difficult to cope. The following demands may contribute to the maintenance of depressive feelings (not exhaustive)
  - Loss or bereavement
  - Lower socioeconomic circumstances
  - Unemployment or work related pressures
  - Relationship problems

## LO3 Understand how depression affects individuals and others

### Know how depression can affect the individual and others

#### Taught content

- Depression can affect many aspects of an individual's life and everyone around them. The following are some examples of how depression can affect people's lives
- Those affecting the individual:
  - Feelings of hopelessness and negative thinking are common for individuals who suffer from depression. These can contribute to a spiralling effect on depression
  - Sleep patterns may be adversely affected, either through an inability to get to sleep or to have adequate sleep. This can affect daily functions, alter mood and lead to a withdrawal from social activities
  - Altered social contact – some people may need to be around others more than they usually would, while others may do the opposite and become withdrawn and want to avoid contact
  - A loss of confidence may arise from feeling low, tearful, or guilty associated with their depression
  - A person with depression may find it difficult to develop relationships
  - A person with depression may find their appetite altered, either reduced or increased
  - A person with depression may find daily planning more difficult; this can affect family life, work and relationships
- Those affecting others:
  - People around those suffering from depression may feel frustrated or guilty at the situation or the lack of help they are able to provide
  - Work colleagues may become frustrated at having to do extra work or cover for those suffering from depression
  - Stigmas attached to mental health can lead to others behaving inappropriately towards people with depression, e.g. anger
  - Family, friends and others may experience a grief response, as there is a perception that they have lost someone close

## LO4 Understand how to manage and support people experiencing depression

### Know the treatments available to help manage depression and psychotic depression

#### Taught content

- The treatment of depression depends on the severity of the condition and can involve one or a combination of interventions
- For mild depression, a doctor may suggest a combination of waiting and monitoring of the condition to see if it improves. Typically this will be reviewed in 2 weeks for improvement in symptoms. If the symptoms persist the doctor may recommend the following examples of treatments/therapies
  - Exercise or physical activity – exercise and physical activity has been shown to help with depression due to its potential to release endorphins that is associated with improved mood and relaxation. Exercise may also be prescribed by a GP as part of an exercise referral scheme
  - Talking therapies – therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT) and or counselling can be used for mild and moderate depression. CBT deals with current problems and aims to find practical ways to improve the state of mind. CBT has also been shown to be effective in helping people with psychotic depression
  - Medication – antidepressants are sometimes used to treat depression
  - Combination therapy – moderate to severe depression is sometimes treated with a combination of CBT and antidepressants
    - A combination of antipsychotics and antidepressants can be used to treat psychotic depression
  - Self-help groups – social support groups, including friends and relatives, can help people suffering from depression
  - Hospitalisation – a person being treated for psychotic depression may be admitted to hospital if other treatments are not effective. Although controversial, electroconvulsive therapy may sometimes be recommended for severe or psychotic depression

### Know the organisations available to help with the management and support of stress and anxiety

#### Taught content

- Examples of agencies and organisations that help with the management of depression
  - Mind – information about depression, its symptoms, causes and treatment  
<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/about-depression/>
  - Rethink – helpful resources and factsheets to help with depression  
<https://www.rethink.org/advice-and-information/about-mental-illness/learn-more-about-conditions/depression/>
  - Depression Alliance – an outreach organisation for people suffering with depression, now linked with Mind <https://www.depressionalliance.org>
  - NHS – information on depression, its types, help and support mechanisms  
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/>

### **Guide to taught content**

The content contained within the unit specification is not prescriptive or exhaustive but is intended to provide helpful guidance to teachers and learners with the key areas that will be covered within the unit and relating to the kinds of evidence that should be provided for each assessment objective specific to the unit learning outcomes.

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# Assessment requirements

## 1. Knowledge outcomes

Learners must complete an external theory examination for this unit. This will consist of a multiple-choice question paper which is mapped to the relevant assessment criteria stated below. The theory examination will test the knowledge and understanding from across learning outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Learners should use the unit content sections of this unit to aid revision since exam questions will test the full breadth of content over time.

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO1 Understand depression	1.1. Explain the difference between clinical depression and psychotic depression	External theory examination
	1.2. Describe the signs and symptoms of depression	
	1.3. Outline the factors associated with psychotic depression	

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO2 Understand the causes of depression	2.1. Describe the triggers and life demands that could lead to people developing depression	External theory examination

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO3 Understand how depression affects individuals and others	3.1. Explain the effects of depression on the individual and others	External theory examination

Learning Outcome	Assessment Criteria	Assessment requirement
LO4 Understand how to manage and support people experiencing depression	4.1. Describe the treatments available to help manage depression and psychotic depression	External theory examination
	4.2. Outline the role of two organisations available to help with the management and support of depression	



## Document History

Version	Issue Date	Changes	Role
v1.0	01/04/2021	First published	Product and Regulation Manager