WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

It is natural for most people to feel 'down' from time to time. Sometimes, the sad feelings do not go away. This unhappiness can develop into what we call 'depression', a condition that often goes unrecognised.

Signs of depression

People suffering from depression may experience both physical and emotional symptoms. The following are some signs of depression:

- Headaches, stomachaches or backaches
- Decrease in concentration and memory
- Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, sadness
- Loss of energy such that things seemed 'slowed down'
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or getting up
- You may be drinking heavily or abusing drugs
- Thinking or talking about death and/or suicide
- Loss of interest in ordinary activities like sports or social interactions
- Withdrawal from friends and family, preferring to be alone

What causes depression?

Genetic, physical, psychological, social and environmental factors may contribute to depression. Chemical imbalance in the brain also plays a significant role for some individuals. In such cases, professional assessment by a psychiatrist may be necessary.

A number of other factors may contribute to long term or short-term situational depression. These may include the death of a loved one, any loss of a relationship, change in financial status, health problems, academic difficulties, family conflicts, existential or future concerns. As different people react to life events differently, their susceptibility to depression varies. No matter what the causes are, in most cases, people do recover from depression eventually.
What should I do if I feel depressed?

Take time to assess why you are feeling the way you are feeling. In many cases, feeling down is an expected and appropriate reaction to a problem or situation. However, when these feelings last for a period of time, or significantly interfere with your ability to function, it might be wise to make efforts to change your situation.

Some ideas to try are:

- **Keep active, eat healthy and pay attention to your sleep pattern**
  
  Walk, jog or take an evening walk with a friend or family member.

- **Have regular, nutritious meals and cut down on junk foods**

- **Avoid or reduce consumption of alcoholic drinks as alcohol, being a central nervous system depressant, may make your depression worse**

- **Try to have regular sleeping patterns**

- **Learn and practice relaxation technique**
  
  Negative thoughts experienced when you are feeling depressed can generate feelings of anxiety and tension. Practising a relaxation technique daily can help a great deal to reduce anxiety. The Student Counsellor at the NTU Student Wellbeing Centre can help you to choose and learn a relaxation technique that is suitable and convenient for you to practice regularly. You can also refer to our section on Brief Relaxation Techniques.

- **Put pleasure and fun into each day**
  
  Treat yourself to something that you will enjoy and that will require you to expend some energy each day.

- **Have a social support network**
  
  Develop a support network comprising of people who are supportive, encouraging, and uplifting for you. Have at least one person that you can confide in rather than keeping your worries or concerns to yourself. Spend time with other people rather than being alone most of the time; it may be difficult to do so but it usually makes you feel better.

- **Seek professional help**
  
  It is sometimes difficult to take the steps to help yourself when you are feeling depressed. At such times, consider seeking help and professional counselling from the NTU Student Wellbeing Centre.

- **Build structure into your day**
  
  Set small daily tasks and stick to them. The next step after this would be to slowly make a weekly schedule of your daily activities and try to stick to them.