



# Age Concern and Help the Aged **Down, but not out factsheet**

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## **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)** **Author: Dr Rebecca Mather**

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### **What is Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)?**

We all know that how we get on with other people affects our mood. A friendly greeting, an offer of help, time spent talking over a problem with someone else, can all lift our mood. A brush-off, a criticism, an argument, can make us feel low.

Significant difficulties in our relationships can lead to significant depression. Often when people are depressed they become withdrawn, worried, tired, disinterested and irritable and this can make relationships more difficult.

Even if relationship difficulties are not the cause of your depression, the depression is likely to have an impact on your relationships. So IPT as a treatment can still be useful.

IPT is a structured talking therapy in which you are able to explore the effect your current relationships have on your mood and vice versa, and find ways to get what you want from your relationships.

### **What can I expect of the sessions?**

IPT involves three stages.

#### **Assessment stage**

In the initial sessions you and your therapist will build up a detailed picture of your life, including family relationships, schooling, work, marriage, and how you have coped with difficulties before. Your therapist will also talk with you about recent events in your life that have led up to you being depressed. You will also look at the network of relationships that are important to you now. While some people that you are close to will probably be helpful and supportive, you may also wish that other relationships would change. There might also be important people that you are missing. There will be an opportunity to review your symptoms of depression as well and how to manage these.

Together with your therapist you will understand how events in the past shape how you feel about yourself and others and how you handle difficult events in your life now.

They will also help you identify an important area for you to work on through the IPT sessions, which could be your feelings about:

- A transition such as retirement, divorce, becoming a carer, moving home or getting used to changes in your health
- A bereavement

- A conflict with one or more people that are close to you
- Long-standing difficulties in making and keeping relationships

### **Middle stage**

In the middle sessions of IPT you will talk about how changes in your current important relationships affect your mood and how to improve those relationships. Every week you will review with your therapist what has happened in your relationships in the previous week and how it has affected your mood.

You can discuss what you expect from relationships, how you express your feelings and convey to others what you want, and try to understand the other person's point of view. You can discuss different options for resolving problems, different ways to handle situations, and then try out new ways of doing things between sessions. Your relationships should become more supportive and satisfying, helping you to deal with current life events and so alleviating the symptoms of depression.

### **Final stage**

In these sessions you will review the changes that you have made, how you have done this, and how you will use the tactics that you have learnt if you feel depressed in the future. You will also be able to talk about how you feel about the therapy ending.

### **What can I expect of the therapist?**

Your therapist will be a trained professional used to treating people with depression and using talking therapies. They will be able to provide a safe, supportive and encouraging relationship in which you can talk confidentially about your feelings, fears and wishes. They will help you to think about different approaches to your relationships and how you might change things for the future.

They will ensure that you continue to think about the issues around the current area of difficulty. They will remind you how many sessions are left. If your depression has responded to IPT but the therapist is concerned that it will return in the future they may suggest that you continue at the end of treatment with a limited number of monthly maintenance sessions.

### **What is expected of me?**

You will be expected to attend 12 to 16 weekly sessions lasting 50 minutes. You will be asked to talk about your feelings and relationships and talk about what has gone on in the previous week. With your therapist you will have agreed on changes that you want in your relationships and as therapy progresses you will be asked to try out new approaches to achieve these changes. Your therapist will ask you to talk about things that went well and not so well between therapy sessions.

### **Is IPT an alternative to antidepressant medication?**

Most people are treated with antidepressant medication at the same time as having IPT although some people will benefit from IPT alone. You can discuss what is best for you with your therapist and doctor.

Also see our factsheet: *"Medication for depression in later life,"* by Professor Robert Baldwin.

### What if IPT does not work?

IPT has been developed as an effective treatment for a range of mental health problems (depression, anxiety, eating disorders) and in a range of age groups. It has been delivered on a one to one basis, as a group treatment and even over the telephone. It is of proven effectiveness in late life depression and we know that people continue to improve even after the course of IPT has ended. However not everyone finds that IPT suits them and your therapist and doctor can suggest alternatives if it is not effective for you.

### Other sources of help

#### Age Concern and Help the Aged

Free National Information Line: 0800 00 99 66

Many local Age Concerns provide, or can direct you to, a range of support services such as:

- Information and advice
- Day centres and lunch clubs
- Befriending schemes
- Bereavement counselling, depression support, person-centred therapy
- Transport to activities
- Exercise programmes
- A free benefits check
- Insurance services
- Dementia care

For more information, or to find your nearest Age Concern, please contact our free National Information Line on 0800 00 99 66.

More information about our depression campaign 'Down, but not out' and our free resources and factsheets can be found on our website:

[www.ageconcern.org.uk/downbutnotout](http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/downbutnotout)

#### Other factsheets in the series include:

What is depression? by Professor Carolyn Chew-Graham
The causes and effects of depression in later life by Professor Klaus Ebmeier and Dr Philip Wilkinson
Medication for depression in later life by Dr Robert Baldwin
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) by Dr Philip Wilkinson
Counselling and Psychotherapy by Judith Brech
Self help for beating depression and staying well by Philippa Cuttell & Lisa Bracher
Thoughts of self harm and suicide by Dr Dan Harwood

#### Depression Alliance

Provides information and support services to those affected by depression

Telephone: 0845 123 23 20

Email: [information@depressionalliance.org](mailto:information@depressionalliance.org)

Website: [www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

### **Mind**

Provides information and advice on depression and campaigns to promote and protect good mental health for everyone.

Telephone: 020 8519 2122

Email: [contact@mind.org.uk](mailto:contact@mind.org.uk)

Website: [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

### **Mind Cymru**

Telephone: 02920 395 123

Email: [contactwales@mind.org.uk](mailto:contactwales@mind.org.uk)

Website: <http://www.mind.org.uk/>

### **Alzheimer's Society**

Gives support to families by linking them through membership and provides information on Alzheimer's disease and other dementias.

Telephone: 020 7423 3500

Email: [info@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:info@alzheimers.org.uk)

Website: [alzheimers.org.uk](http://alzheimers.org.uk)

### **Aware (Ireland)**

Assists and supports those suffering from depression and their families in Ireland. A helpline is available as well as support groups, lectures, and current research on depression.

Telephone: 1890 303 302

Email: [wecanhelp@aware.ie](mailto:wecanhelp@aware.ie)

Website: [www.aware.ie/](http://www.aware.ie/)

### **Samaritans**

Provide a confidential 24 hours a day helpline for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which could lead to suicide.

Telephone: 1850 60 90 90 (24 hours)

Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

Email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

### **CRUSE - Bereavement Care**

Offers a service of counselling, advice and opportunities for social contact to all bereaved people.

Telephone: 0870 167 1677

Email: [helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk](mailto:helpline@crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

Website: [www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

### **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**

Can help you to find a therapist in your area

Telephone: 01455 883 316

Email: [bacp@bacp.co.uk](mailto:bacp@bacp.co.uk)

Website: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

### **Depression UK**

A national mutual support group for people suffering from depression

Email: [info@depressionuk.org](mailto:info@depressionuk.org)

Website: [www.depressionuk.org](http://www.depressionuk.org)

## Healthtalk Online

People's accounts of their illnesses and treatment, including older people with depression in the Mental Health Section

Website: [www.healthtalkonline.org/](http://www.healthtalkonline.org/)

## Royal College of Psychiatrists

Provides free mental health information and leaflets.

Telephone: 020 7235 2351

Email: [leaflets@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:leaflets@rcpsych.ac.uk)

Website: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk)