

# UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

Depression is a very common emotional reaction which comes later on in the stages of rehabilitation. Depression usually surfaces when the person with the head injury begins to realise the full extent of his losses. This often occurs after formal rehabilitation is over, when the person has gone home. There is a realisation that life can never be like it was before. It might be that the activities that previously produced pleasure are no longer possible. This might include high standards at work, sporting activities, mobility, being quick-witted, being sexually attractive, writing reading or being the breadwinner. But often depression is a good sign because it is actually a sign of progress. The person has become progressively more aware of the reality of his situation and is digesting the emotional consequences. To reach a level of real adjustment and acceptance it may well be necessary to work through this painful trough of depression. It is useful to distinguish between the normal, healthy type of depression, where the individual is overwhelmingly sad, pessimistic and is actively grieving for the many losses he has to adjust to, and a depressed state where the person is emotionally blocked and is unable to express his feelings openly. The latter state may benefit from professional counselling from somebody who knows about head injury.

## **Coping with Depression (for Family and Carers)**

1. If suicidal thoughts are expressed take them seriously and seek professional help.
2. Adopt diversionary tactics to get his mind off depressive thoughts.
3. Do not take responsibility for the depression – it is not your fault.
4. Do not remind the person with the head injury of his progress by reiterating how bad he used to be. This will only make him feel worse.

## **Coping with Depression (for the person with the head injury)**

1. Talk it through with somebody who is a good listener.
2. Express your feelings – do not bottle them up.
3. Get involved in a head injury support group and talk to others in a similar situation. Find out how they cope.
4. Involve yourself in any activity that brings pleasure. Try to stay active. Break large tasks down into smaller tasks.
5. Lower your expectations. Work towards enjoying the pleasure of the moment rather than the pleasure of achievements.