

# 10 Steps to Better Emotional Health for Men

We all become ill at some point in our lives. Physical illnesses like the flu can make us miserable but in some ways they are easier to deal with than emotional illness. That's because -

- we often blame ourselves for the way we feel;
- it's often difficult to admit even to ourselves that there's something's wrong; and
- we think that there's nothing we can really do about it

Nobody is pretending that there's a magic wand which will make you feel better but here are a few things you could do which might help.

## 1) Talk to somebody about how you feel.

It's not only a saying that a 'problem shared is a problem halved'. You really **will** feel better if you talk your problems through with a friend or relative.

If you have been losing sleep over how you feel for more than a week you might also want to arrange to see your Doctor.

**Don't** think that you'll be wasting their time - stress, depression & other emotional problems are the largest single reason for local people visiting their GP.

## 2) Don't think that you are alone.

One problem with suggesting that you talk to somebody is that at some points in your life you may not have a friend or parent or partner to turn to.

So on top of feeling down you might also feel isolated and alone. But there are groups out there who you could share your worries with. There is a men's group at the PROP Stress Centre and a few others throughout Greater Pilton. If you can't face talking to a group then the Samaritans are also there to listen.

There are also specialist workers called "counsellors" who can listen to your problems. The Health Hut provides a counselling service: just phone and ask about it.

There are other specialist services for carers, people suffering bereavement and such like. You will probably be surprised at how many men have similar worries to your own. **For example:** One in five men suffer from depression at some point in their lives.

### 3) Get help and advice.

If there is a problem that's making you worried there are people who you can help. **For example -** In a recent survey 7 out of 10 local men said that they had worried about debt and money problems.

You can get advice on debt and many other issues from Granton Information Centre, the CAB and the Council's Welfare Rights Team. They've each helped thousands of local people to get more benefits and to cope better with debt.

Even if they can't help with the problem that you're facing at the moment - for example the worry caused by the death of someone close to you - they can usually put you in contact with somebody who can. You won't be any worse off after seeking advice. Why would you prefer just to worry yourself sick?

### 4) If you feel down - take a walk!

Or a swim or any sort of exercise that you enjoy.

**Why?** - When you feel down your brain can produce chemicals which make you feel even worse. Some disturb your sleep leaving you tired during the day but unable to get a good rest at night.

On the other hand regularly going for a half hour walk or swim can produce other chemicals which leave you feeling happier. They can also help you get some sleep. So these chemicals are natural "anti-depressants" that you can get anytime without needing to go to the doctor.

Sometimes you may be so ill that you really need medication but healthy exercise is not going to do you any harm. There are some exercises that you can easily do on your own. Like a walk to Cramond or an exercise class at the local community centre. Whatever it is - just do it.

### 5) Don't think that a drink will help!

**Why?** - Occasional social drinking (a pint) doesn't do us much harm. Socialising with friends usually leaves us feeling better, especially if they're close enough to share our problems with.

**But** alcohol itself doesn't cheer you up. In fact alcohol is a depressant. If you feel down before you have a few drinks you will almost certainly feel much worse afterwards. The more you drink the more depressed you'll feel.

**And** even though alcohol can help you nod off it actually disturbs your sleep. Alcohol can wake you during the night leaving you even more tired and worried.

So by all means see your friends. But if you think that booze can solve your problems you're on your way to even bigger ones.

### 6) Have a banana! (instead of a Bounty)

Ever felt down and gone to the shops for some chocolate? Join the rest of us!

You probably found that chocolate gives you an immediate lift cheering you up. That's because it's full of sugar and caffeine. Both are stimulants that give you a "rush". But how did you feel an hour later? Sugar "rushes" quickly wear-off and can leave you feeling worse than before. And caffeine is going to keep you awake through the night with no company other than your worries.

There is a way to get that good feeling and avoid most of the bad side effects though - eat fruit instead. Fruits like bananas are also full of sugar but release it more slowly. Bananas also help produce natural anti-depressants in the brain. That means that the good feeling lasts longer. And even better you avoid the down you get after bingeing on chocolate or other sweets.

Nobody's saying that you can't ever have chocolate again but replacing some of it with fruit will not only keep you happier it will also help you live longer.

## **(7) Eat well (that's healthily)!**

Eating too much - binge eating junk food like burgers & pizzas - not only doesn't make you feel better it isn't good for your health - emotional or physical. If you really begin to eat far more than you need, perhaps eating so much that you're sick, it's usually a sign of deeper emotional problems.

But losing your appetite can be a sign that you're suffering from depression.

So why not steer a middle path and eat food rich in vitamins and other ingredients that make you feel better and keep healthier. That's more fresh fruit and vegetables and less fat.

But if your eating habits have already changed for the worse - bingeing or loss of appetite - get along to your GP for some advice.

## **(8) Don't take the hard way out!**

If you are feeling very low one of the most common things is to think about suicide. It is now the highest cause of death amongst young Scots men. It's not a sensible response to your worries. It's the depression affecting how you think.

Suicide is **NEVER** an easy way out. It leaves your friends and family devastated. It's not your worries that are gone once you're dead - just YOU. So if you're thinking about harming yourself -

Let someone know about how you feel. Don't dwell on how you feel. Instead go for a walk, listen to music or watch TV. Better still, if you can, be with other people. Even if you're not much company.

Avoid alcohol and drugs. They will make you feel worse. And they make doing something about how you feel much more likely - even if only by mistake (overdosing, choking on your own vomit and so on). Sounds horrible and ugly doesn't it. That's because suicide is.

**Remember** even if there's nobody else to hear your pain there is always your GP and the Samaritans are just a phone call away.

## **(9) Don't Lose It!**

All of us lose our tempers. If it helps get something off our chest and out into the open it needn't do any lasting harm. But have you ever found yourself "losing it" completely and shouting at strangers? Or worse becoming violent towards those you love? Angry outbursts leave us feeling guilty & embarrassed, with fewer friends and shattered relationships.

Of course doing something about our anger can be difficult. Feeling stressed about important things (like debt) makes it much more likely that we will lose our temper over things that don't really matter. So getting help with the big problems can help us regain control of our temper.

But there are also ways to "manage" our anger. For example the old saying about "counting to ten" really can work. That's because it gives us the time to think about whether what we say will make things better or worse. Or you could channel your anger into something harmless like DIY. Or put all that energy into campaigning for better local services. Some groups also run anger management "classes" which can teach you ways to control your temper.

## **(10) Be happy!**

**Does money make us happy?** - Believe it or not winning millions on the lottery might not make you happy. Though lottery winners are super-happy to start with they quickly return to how they felt before they won. If they weren't happy before they won they'll remain unhappy afterwards.

**What is happiness?** Happiness is linked to -optimism - that's belief in a better future, self-esteem - a feeling that we're worth something and control - over our lives and at work.

We feel happiest when we have a sense of purpose and are connected to other people.

**So how do we get happy?** - Being a good father, doing a good job at work, helping provide for our families. These are all examples of things in which we feel a sense of purpose. That also explains why family break-up and unemployment can leave men feeling very depressed.

**But** we can still be involved in things when we're out of work. There are lots of community groups to get involved in, courses to take and people that continue to need our help and support.

We **don't** stop being good neighbours, friends, sons, boyfriends, husbands or fathers just because we're unemployed. The only people who can stop us being connected to the important people in our lives is ourselves. So the more we involve ourselves in being members of our families, groups - and the community we live in - the better we feel about ourselves. In other words - we feel HAPPIER! It can be that easy. And that difficult!

### **In conclusion:**

There are many serious mental illnesses (like schizophrenia) that this booklet hasn't even tried to cover. They will often require medical diagnosis and treatment. But though doing the things suggested here won't necessarily make you feel better about yourself they **will** make it more likely.

Take care of yourself.

## **Useful Contacts**

### **Stress/Depression**

**PROP Stress Centre**

**Men's Group**

Tel: 0131-343-6375

### **Information & Advice**

**Granton Information Centre**

Tel: 0131-551-2459

**Pilton CAB**

Tel: 0131-332-9434

### **Someone to Listen**

**Counselling Service**

**Pilton Community Health Project**

Tel: 0131-332-0871

**The Samaritans**

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

(calls charged at local rates)

**SANE/SANELINE**

Out of hours helpline offering practical information and emotional support to anyone affected by mental health problems. Hours 12pm to 2am

Tel: 0845-767-8000

(calls charged at local rates)

**No Panic**

Freephone Line and helpful booklets

for those suffering from: Anxiety, Agoraphobia, Phobias, Panic Attacks, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders &

Tranquilliser Withdrawal

Tel: 0808-808-0545 (Free)

**Relationships**

**Couple Counselling Scotland**

0131-556-1527

## **Drugs & Alcohol**

**NEDAC** (North Edinburgh  
Drugs Advice Centre)  
Tel: 0131-332-2314

**Alcoholics Anonymous**  
24 hour Helpline  
0845-769-7555  
(Calls charged at local rates)

Edinburgh Area Helpline  
0131-225-2727



