

Too Blue

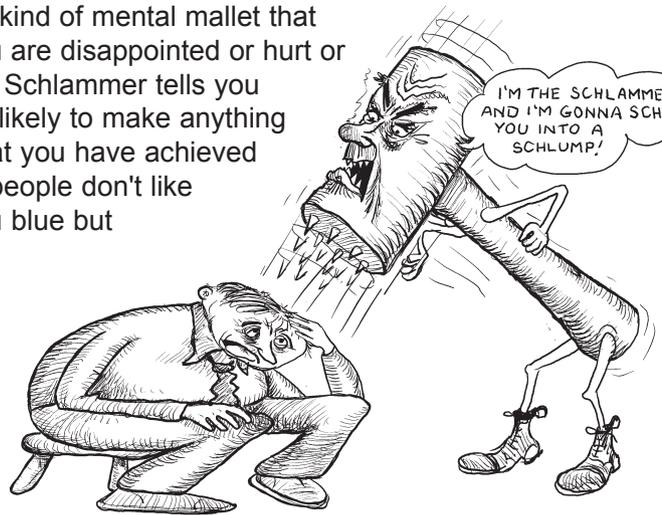
Most of us feel miserable some of the time. Often these sad moods are just Blues and Blahs - sometimes they are much more severe. If you feel low or sad for a while you might well say that you are depressed but being “depressed” can mean many things.

It can mean having a short burst of blues and blahs or being devastated by a loss. If it lasts for more than two weeks and it is rather severe it can mean having one of the illnesses a psychiatrist might call a “mood disorder” or “depressive illness” or part of a “manic depressive” illness now often known as “Bipolar Disorder”.

The Blues and the Blahs

As a psychiatrist and cartoonist I often think in cartoon characters. Here’s what came to mind when I thought about blues and blahs.

A “Schlammer” turned up as a kind of mental mallet that bangs you over the head if you are disappointed or hurt or angry. While whacking you the Schlammer tells you that you’re no good and never likely to make anything of yourself. It tells you that what you have achieved is worthless or trivial and that people don’t like you. That hurts and makes you blue but it is not the same as a serious depression.



Then I thought about what happens when you can’t be bothered doing much.

Perhaps you sit around and watch a lot of TV you don’t really like or stare at the ceiling feeling empty and bored. Your friends don’t bother to call you...

...there’s nothing of interest

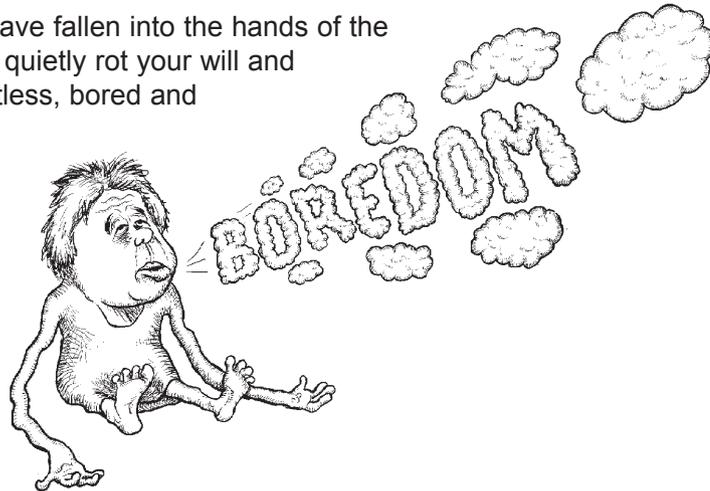
...no point to anything

...nothing good ever happens to you.

You have the

blahs.

That means that you have fallen into the hands of the 'Snuthingtodo who will quietly rot your will and energy, leaving you listless, bored and sad.



The Schlammer and the 'Snuthingtodo rarely work alone...

...the Poor Me usually comes along to add a little comforting self pity.

The Schlammer, the 'Snuthingtodo and the Poor Me play a part in ordinary situations; they drag you down for a while but it's not overwhelming. You are usually back to normal quite quickly so it is not the same thing as having a depressive illness.



Sometimes you might have very good reason to feel very sad.

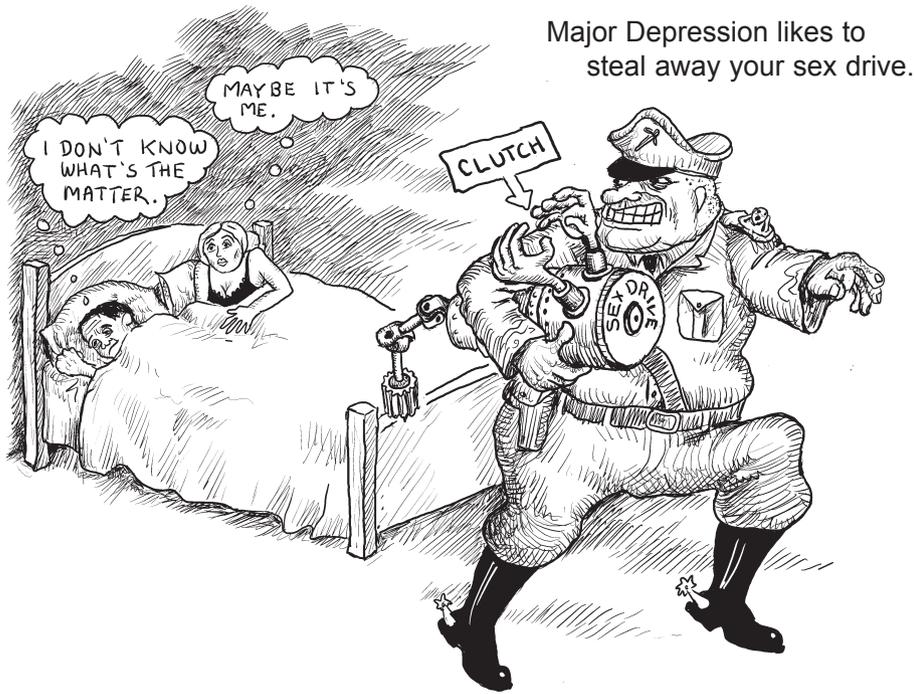
Grief

If you lose someone you love, it is natural to feel terribly sad and full of grief. Grief can seem just like depression but it's not the same.

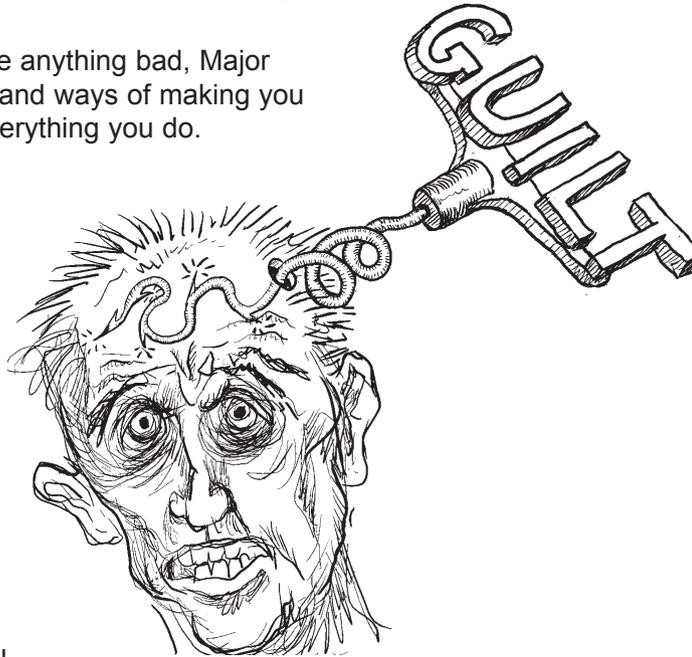
Grief is often overwhelming. It is as though part of you is torn away leaving a terrible wound. At first it seems the wound will never heal and you feel doomed to constant pain. Then, if things progress as they should, life reaches out and begins to draw you back into the world.



...you lose interest in sex and can get no pleasure from it.



Even if you haven't done anything bad, Major Depression has a thousand ways of making you feel very guilty about everything you do.



When Major Depression visits he brings many forms of misery. You can't rest or eat properly, you are tortured by guilt, you can no longer think clearly and life holds no enjoyment or interest for you any more. You become

Eating, exercise and interests

Improving the quality of your diet may well help defeat depression. Not eating enough or eating far too much, particularly fat and sugar, can make you feel unwell and drag your mood down.

Exercise is an easy way to get some extra antidepressant effect. You don't have to do enough exercise to get fit; just enough to get your body going a bit and the cobwebs cleared out of your brain. If you are feeling depressed, rate your depression on a scale from 1 to 10 then take a walk for half an hour. Walk fast enough to get a little puffed but don't try and prove a point about losing weight or getting fit. Leave that for later.

When you get home, give yourself time to stop puffing and then rate your mood again. It is likely to have improved a couple of points. Nothing spectacular but very welcome all the same.



Depression destroys motivation. Most of us sit around and wait for motivation to return but it might take months to appear. Even if you don't feel like it, start on something you used to like doing. If you do this, motivation might well show up after you've started. Doing things brings motivation; waiting for motivation brings nothing.

Depression usually involves an endless cycle of gloomy thoughts. If you get started on something, however small, you will sometimes think about your new project. You will start to imagine it finished and plan what you will do next, instead of filling your mind with doom, guilt and disaster.

Breaking the gloom cycle is an important part of breaking out of depression.

