

DEPRESSION AT WORK • ARTICLE 4

WHY DO I FEEL EXHAUSTED BEFORE MY WORKING DAY EVEN BEGINS?

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

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Introduction

"I haven't even started work yet, and I already feel like I need to go back to bed."

For many people living with depression, the hardest part of the day isn't the workload - it's finding the energy to begin.

You may wake feeling as though you haven't slept, despite spending hours in bed. The thought of getting dressed, travelling to work, answering emails or speaking to colleagues can feel overwhelming before the day has even started.

This exhaustion isn't simply feeling tired. It can feel as though every task requires enormous effort, leaving you wondering how you'll make it through the day.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone. Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms of depression, and it can have a profound impact on your ability to work.

Depression Is More Than Feeling Sad

Many people think depression is purely an emotional condition, but it also affects the body.

Depression can influence sleep quality, concentration, motivation, energy levels and physical functioning. Even after what appears to be a full night's sleep, you may wake feeling completely drained.

This isn't because you haven't tried hard enough to rest. Your brain and body are working differently while you're experiencing depression, making it much harder to feel refreshed.

Why Does Everything Feel Like Such Hard Work?

When you're depressed, even simple tasks require more mental effort.

Activities that once happened automatically - getting showered, making breakfast, packing your bag or driving to work - may now require conscious planning and motivation.

By the time you arrive at work, you've already used a significant amount of your mental and emotional energy.

This is why many people describe feeling exhausted before their working day has truly begun.

The Cycle of Fatigue

Workplace fatigue can quickly become a vicious cycle.

You feel exhausted before work.

You spend the day pushing yourself to keep going.

Because you're using so much energy simply to function, you arrive home with very little left for yourself, your family or the activities you once enjoyed.

You may skip exercise, withdraw from social contact or struggle to prepare meals because you're simply too tired.

Over time, this lack of recovery can make the fatigue feel even more overwhelming.

The Invisible Effort

From the outside, colleagues may only see that you've arrived at work.

What they don't see is the invisible effort involved in getting there.

They don't see the internal battle to get out of bed.

They don't see how much energy it took to get dressed, drive to work or hold yourself together during the morning meeting.

Many people with depression become experts at hiding just how exhausted they feel.

The effort of masking symptoms can be just as draining as the work itself.

What Can Help?

Although fatigue may not disappear overnight, there are ways to reduce the pressure on yourself.

You may find it helpful to:

Prioritise your most important tasks during the times of day when your energy is highest.

Break larger jobs into smaller, manageable steps.

Take regular breaks to reduce mental fatigue.

Maintain consistent sleep and wake times where possible.

Eat regularly and stay hydrated throughout the day.

Speak to your manager if temporary adjustments could support your workload.

Seek advice from your GP or a mental health professional if fatigue persists or worsens.

Recovery often involves working with your energy rather than constantly fighting against it.

Don't Measure Yourself Against Your Healthy Self

One of the hardest parts of depression is comparing yourself to who you used to be.

You may think:

"I used to manage all of this easily."

While that may be true, it's also important to recognise that you're managing a health condition.

Your expectations need to reflect your current circumstances, not the version of yourself before depression developed.

Being compassionate with yourself isn't lowering your standards - it's responding realistically to what your mind and body need.

Reflection

Ask yourself:

"Am I tired because I'm lazy, or because my mind and body have been working incredibly hard just to get me through each day?"

The answer may help you replace self-criticism with understanding.

Key Takeaway

Feeling exhausted before work begins is a common experience for people living with depression. It isn't a sign of weakness or poor motivation. Depression affects both the brain and the body, making everyday activities far more demanding than they appear.

Recognising your fatigue as a symptom - not a personal failing - is an important step towards finding the right support, making helpful adjustments and beginning your recovery.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

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