

Hope for millions of patients battling depression as scientists discover why the blues can disrupt sleep after 100 years of research

- Three brain regions are strongly connected in depression, researchers claim
- They say this leads to poor sleep by causing sufferers to dwell on bad thoughts
- Warwick University experts hope it will open up avenues of treating depression

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Hope has today been raised for millions of people battling **depression** who find it difficult to sleep at night.

For researchers have finally discovered the reason why the blues can affect sleep quality after 100 years of mounting evidence.

Warwick University scientists found brain regions linked with short-term memory, self and negative emotions are strongly connected in depression.

They claim this may lead to poor sleep quality, such as struggling to get to sleep, by causing sufferers to dwell on bad thoughts.

Professor Jianfeng Feng, who led the trial, hopes it will open up new avenues of treating depression's sleep side effects through new therapies or pills.



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He said: 'The relation between depression and sleep has been observed more than one hundred years.

'And now we have identified the neural mechanisms of how they are connected for the first time.

'These findings provide a neural basis for understanding how depression relates to poor sleep quality.

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'And this in turn has implications for treatment of depression and improvement of sleep quality because of the brain areas identified.'

Around 216 million people around the world have depression, including three million in the UK and more than 16 million in the US.

Depression and sleep problems often go hand in hand.

Charities estimate three quarters of depressed patients have difficulty falling asleep, or often wake during the night.

Brain scans of 10,000 depressed people were taken for the new study, published in the JAMA Psychiatry.

Professor Feng and colleagues examined the neural mechanisms underlying the relation between depression and sleep quality.

In the brains of those living with depressive problems, they discovered a strong connection between three key regions.

The first was the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex - an area of the brain heavily linked with associated with short-term memory.

The others were the precuneus - associated with the self, and the lateral orbitofrontal cortex - which controls negative emotions.

Professor Feng said: 'This results in increased ruminating thoughts which are at least part of the mechanism that impairs sleep quality.'

The Warwick team were helped in the research by scientists from Fudan University in Shanghai, China.

What is depression?

While it is normal to feel down from time to time, people with depression may feel persistently unhappy for weeks or months on end.

Depression can affect anyone at any age and is fairly common - approximately one in ten people are likely to experience at some point in their life.

Depression is a genuine health condition which people cannot just ignore or 'snap out of it'.

Symptoms and effects vary, but can include constantly feeling upset or hopeless, or losing interest in things you used to enjoy.

It can also cause physical symptoms such as problems sleeping, tiredness, having a low appetite or sex drive, and even feeling physical pain.

In extreme cases it can lead to suicidal thoughts.

Traumatic events can trigger it, and people with a family history may be more at risk.

It is important to see a doctor if you think you or someone you know has depression, as it can be managed with lifestyle changes, therapy or medication.

Source: NHS Choices



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It follows a study in April that found eating raw carrots and spinach can boost ward off depression because they contain more 'essential' nutrients.

Scientists said raw vegetables - and fruit - are better for mental health than those which are cooked, tinned or processed.

Health campaigns have traditionally focused on the amount of fruit and vegetables people should eat, such as the five a day message.

But the study, by researchers in New Zealand, implies that the way in which they are prepared is also important to consider.

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