

Depression

Are you experiencing depression? Do you know someone with depression? Depression is more than just feeling low or sad during tough times. 1 in 6¹ Australians will experience depression in their lifetime.



What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad or low, it is an illness that affects 1 in 6 Australians. Depression is a persistent lowering of someone's mood, which can last for weeks, months or even years.

Many people do not recognise their symptoms or do not get help, however depression is treatable and with the correct treatment people with depression can go on to lead happy and productive lives.

What causes depression?

Depression is experienced differently by different people and similarly there are various factors that may possibly trigger an episode of depression.

- **Life Events** — Events such as the loss of a loved one, or losing your job can trigger depression. However, it is more likely to occur when you are already at risk due to several other factors such as long term unemployment, ongoing financial stress or ongoing difficult relationships.
- **Personal/Biological Factors** — A history of depression in the family may put you at an increased genetic risk, however it doesn't mean that you will develop depression, and other factors play a role.
- **People with particular personality styles** are more likely to experience depression.
- **Drug and alcohol use** can both lead to and result from depression.

It is important to remember that the exact causes of depression are unclear but it appears to be a mix of personal risk factors and triggering life events

What are the signs and symptoms?

Depression presents differently in different people. Some indicators are listed below. Whether you have some or all, it is best to discuss how you feel with a qualified professional:

- feeling sad, 'flat' or down most of the time (for two weeks or more)
- losing interest in activities you used to enjoy (for two weeks or more)
- feeling tired or lacking energy and motivation
- moodiness that is out of character
- increased irritability and frustration
- increased alcohol and drug use
- changes in your weight or appetite
- having problems sleeping or sleeping all the time
- feeling worthless or guilty
- feeling restless, edgy or slowed down
- having difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- thinking repeatedly about death or suicide.

Most people experience some of these feelings and behaviours at different times. The difference with depression is that the symptoms are ongoing and that they impact on the person's ability to carry out their day to day activities.



¹ ABS — National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2008)



Are you withdrawing from family and friends? Do you not get pleasure out of things you previously enjoyed? Are you having problems with your sleep? Do you feel life is not worth living anymore? Are you feeling irritable? Do you feel like a failure? Has your appetite increased or decreased? Are you feeling overwhelmed?

Have you considered you may have depression? Talk to someone now.

Treatment

Treatment can help a lot to reduce and even eliminate the symptoms of depression. Treatment may include a combination of psychological therapy, medication and community support. In severe cases where other treatments do not help, electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) can be helpful too.

1. **Individual therapy** — a doctor, psychologist, or other health professional talks with the person about their symptoms, and discusses alternative ways of thinking about and managing them. There are a number of evidence-based treatments that can make a difference.
2. **Medication** — antidepressant medications may be needed, especially if the symptoms are moderate-severe.
3. **Community support programs** — this support should include information, accommodation, help with finding suitable work, training and education, psychosocial rehabilitation and mutual support groups. Understanding and acceptance by the community is also very important.
4. **Lifestyle and complementary therapies** — there are a number of changes that individuals can make in their lives that can make a difference, especially when the symptoms are mild. These may include exercise, planning pleasant events and many others.



There is no one set way to treat depression but it is important to consider that you may need a combination of medical, psychological, community and lifestyle treatments.

More tips for addressing depression

Taking steps to manage depression is important for your current and long-term health. Depression is an illness that can get worse if left untreated.

- **See your doctor** — talk to your doctor about how you've been feeling to find the most appropriate treatment for you. Your doctor will also check your physical health for things that may impact on how you are feeling. Your doctor can also refer you to a psychologist or other mental health professional for treatment, sometimes with a rebate through Medicare.
- **Talk to someone you trust** — talking to family, friends, a counsellor, minister or a crisis line, can help you develop an understanding of your situation and help you move forward. There are some very effective treatments through psychologists/mental health professionals that can make a real difference.
- **Look after yourself** — eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. Exercise has been shown to help reduce depression. Take time out to relax and do things you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it now. When you have depression it can be hard to get motivated, but it's important not to isolate yourself.
- **Be aware of your feelings** — noticing changes in your mood and thoughts and identifying what situations make you feel good and bad can help to stop negative thought patterns.
- **Keep safe** — you may be having thoughts about dying, that it may be better to 'not be around' or that you don't know how much longer you can go on. These thoughts are common when people feel very depressed. If you have these thoughts, get help straight away. Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or chat to us online.

Where to go to for support?

Below are some of the places to go for information and support:

- **Contact Lifeline:** 13 11 14 (available 24/7) or Online Crisis Support Chat (available nightly at www.lifeline.org.au)
- **Beyond Blue** — 1300 224 636 (24hrs)
- **Reachout** (for young people) — www.au.professionals.reachout.com
- **Suicide Call Back Service** — 1300 659 467 (24hrs)
- **MindSpot** — www.mindspot.org.au
- **E-couch** — www.ecouch.anu.edu.au/welcome

For local services and centres in your area, including mental health and depression support services, visit the Lifeline Service Seeker Directory at www.lifeline.serviceseeker.com.au



Phone 13 11 14 | www.lifeline.org.au

Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24/7) if you are feeling suicidal or in crisis or visit www.lifeline.org.au to connect online with our Crisis Support Chat (available nightly) and find a range of other useful factsheets.

For volunteer options, op shop locations and training opportunities on the NSW South Coast, visit www.lifelinesouthcoast.org.au

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