

DEPRESSION

What is it?

We all feel down or sad from time to time, it is part of being human. Sadness could be a reaction to something in particular, like the death of a loved one or a relationship break-up. Depression means that feelings of sadness last longer than what is expected.

Clinical depression is an illness, a medical condition. It significantly affects the way someone feels, causing a persistent lowering of mood. Depression is often accompanied by a range of other physical and psychological symptoms that can interfere with the way a person is able to function in their everyday life. The symptoms of depression generally react positively to treatment.

Who does it affect?

Every year, around 6% of all Australian adults are affected by a depressive illness. That means, over 1 million Australian adults are living with depression in any one year.

What does it look like?

Depression has a variety of symptoms and affects people in different ways. Depression can range from mild to severe, but it is often continuous and can last for months or years. People with depression might still be able to perform their day-to-day tasks, but with less interest, confidence and enjoyment. Depression also interferes with sleep, appetite, energy and concentration.

Symptoms of depression can present in different ways, including through thoughts, behaviours and feelings.

Thoughts:

- Being self-critical or self-blaming
- Dark and gloomy thoughts, including thoughts of death or suicide
- Impaired thinking or concentration

Behaviours:

- Changes in appetite or weight
- Changes to normal sleep patterns, can be trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep or over-sleeping
- Not going out or engaging in routine activities
- Physical aches and pains

Feelings:

- Feeling extremely sad or tearful
- Feelings of unhappiness, moodiness and irritability, and sometimes emptiness or numbness
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Lack of confidence
- Loss of interest and motivation in activities once enjoyed
- Loss of interest or pleasure in sexual activities
- Anxiety

What are the different types?

There are many different types of depressive disorders. Symptoms can vary from mild to very severe, and can appear in people of all ages and backgrounds.

Major depression: sometimes called major depressive disorder or clinical depression. It involves low mood and loss of interest in usual activities that persists for most days and lasts for longer than two weeks.

Postnatal depression: some women experience depression following the birth of a child, due to many factors like fluctuating hormones and the lifestyle changes of having a new baby. The symptoms are similar to major depression, but also may include difficulty bonding with the child and feeling inadequate as a mother.

Bipolar disorder: Bipolar disorder involves periods of low mood, or depression, and mania. Mania can vary in presentation and intensity, but some common symptoms include racing thoughts, an abundance of energy and an inability to concentrate. These symptoms can also lead the person to lose touch with reality and experience psychosis.

Depression can occur with other conditions and it has a high comorbidity with anxiety. This means that if you are experiencing depressive symptoms, you are more likely to also

experience anxiety symptoms. Both depression and anxiety can be effectively addressed and managed using a variety of treatment methods.

What are the treatment options?

Treatment can significantly reduce and even eliminate the symptoms of depression. Treatment may include a combination of medication, individual therapy and community support.

- It is important to talk about how you are feeling. Ask for help and speak to someone you trust, whether a health professional family member or friend. A general practitioner is a good place to start when seeking help and information. They can then refer you to see a psychologist where appropriate.
- Most people are able to recover from depression when they receive professional treatment. Treatments are usually based on psychological therapy where a psychologist talks with the person about their symptoms, and discusses alternative ways of thinking about and coping with them.
- Where required, certain medications assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance and help control the symptoms of depression.
- Depending on the type of treatment, most people start to feel better or notice an improvement, after about two to six weeks.
- Healthy eating and exercise can help improve your mood. Try relaxation techniques, writing down your feelings, reducing stress and avoiding alcohol and other drugs. But remember that some days will be better than others. Overcoming depression can take time so it is important to be kind to yourself and seek the relevant professional assistance.

DIY Tips & Strategies

1. **Stay active.** Research suggests maintaining a routine and staying active protects against symptoms of depression. Participating in activities is likely to give you a sense that you are taking control, achieving goals, and mastering tasks. You may even find pleasure in the things you do.
2. **Exercise.** Exercise brings out the body's endorphins, natural pain-killers and pleasure-producing substances inside every one of us.
3. **Eat well.** A healthy diet makes the body strong and increases a sense of well-being.
4. **Social support.** Being able to call on social networks and having support available is a large factor for coping with depression. We do not need to be able to 'do it all ourselves'.

5. **Practise mindfulness.** Mindfulness is about being completely in-touch with the present moment. Practice being totally present to the moment at least once a day.
6. **Stop your ANTS.** Automatic negative thoughts (ANTS) are also called popcorn thoughts because they pop up without us realising them. If you notice an ANT such as "I cannot do this", try to replace it with a coping statement. A coping statement maybe "*I can do this, I'll just take this one step at a time.*"
7. **Refocus.** Shift your focus away from problems and onto solutions. Think of times when you have overcome symptoms of depression in the past. Find out what works and aspire to do more of it.
8. **Sleep.** Your mood can be interrupted by sleeping too little or too much. Aim for a routine sleep schedule by getting up at the same time in the morning and going to bed at the same time at night.
9. **Reach out.** You don't have to find a path through depression by yourself. Seek the help of a professional. Everyone gets stuck from time to time and may need the assistance of an expert to help them get back on track.

Services

If you require immediate assistance, please call emergency services.

For crisis counselling and support or more information:

Australia

Lifeline 131 114

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

MensLine Australia 1300 78 99 78

The United States of America

Mental Health America

Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) OR Text MHA to 741741

You can also contact your GP or Family Physician for a referral to see a registered psychologist or psychiatrist.