

## Understanding depression

Everyone feels sad, down or moody sometimes, especially during tough times. Feeling sad or upset is a normal reaction to difficult situations. But, if you have these feelings intensely for long periods of time and are having trouble with normal activities, you may be experiencing depression.

Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious condition that affects your physical and mental health. It is relatively common, affecting more than one million Australians each year.

Unfortunately, many people with depression don't recognise it or get help. But, it is treatable and most people with depression go on to lead happy, productive lives with the right treatment for them.

## Some causes of depression

- Relationship problems or conflict – e.g. separation/divorce, difficult/abusive relationship
- Job loss, especially long-term unemployment
- Loneliness or feeling isolated
- Excessive drug or alcohol use
- Having another family member who has depression
- Having a serious physical illness
- Changes in how the brain functions
- Personality factors – e.g. anxiety, low self-esteem

Causes of depression vary from person to person because of a mix of personal risk factors and difficult life events. It's also common for people to experience depression and anxiety at the same time.

## Signs of depression

- 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
- Feeling sick and run down, headaches
- 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

### Feelings of depression

- Overwhelmed
- Guilty
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Lacking in confidence
- Unhappy
- Indecisive
- Disappointed
- Miserable
- Sad

### Thoughts associated with depression

- 'I'm a failure.'
- 'It's my fault.'
- 'Nothing good ever happens to me.'
- 'I'm worthless.'
- 'Life's not worth living.'
- 'People would be better off without me.'

If you are experiencing a number of these symptoms, you may have depression. It is very important to visit your GP or another health professional for a full assessment and to discuss treatment options.

### Helpful tips for addressing depression

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

1. See your doctor - Talk to your doctor about how you've been feeling to find the most appropriate treatment for you. Your doctor can also refer you to a psychologist or other mental health professional for treatment, sometimes with a rebate through Medicare.
2. Talk to someone you trust - Talking to family, friends, a counsellor, religious 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.
3. 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 are depressed it can be hard to get motivated, but it's important not to isolate yourself.

4. 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.
5. Keep safe - You may be having thoughts about dying, that it may be better to 'not be around' or 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.

Sometimes it helps to know that someone is listening, and you never have to be alone. Lifeline WA connects people with care and compassion and during their time of need.

Please call Lifeline WA on 13 11 14 if you, or someone you know, needs crisis support. For more information please visit [www.lifelinewa.org.au](http://www.lifelinewa.org.au)