



Depression



Depression is much more than feeling sad or in a low mood after a disappointing or distressing experience. Depression is a serious mental and physical illness that changes how a person thinks, feels and behaves. People with depression need professional help and sometimes medicines to get better.

Depression is thought to be at least partly due to a chemical imbalance in the brain. It is an illness that anyone can develop at any age, but it is more common in people with a family history of depression.

Many factors may contribute to depression including:

- Emotional stress (e.g., loss of a loved one, a relationship breakdown)
- Hormonal changes (e.g., postnatal depression after childbirth)
- Isolation or loneliness
- Unemployment
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Medicines (e.g., some hormones; pain relievers; blood pressure, heart, cancer and psychiatric medicines)
- Medical conditions (e.g., cancer, diabetes, HIV, stroke, thyroid problems)
- Pain

Important

- It is normal to feel sad and in a low mood after a major or distressing event. However, if low feelings become overwhelming or last for more than two weeks and are associated with other symptoms of depression, consult a doctor.
- Feelings of hopelessness and despair can lead to thoughts of suicide and self harm. These thoughts are serious and dangerous. If you experience these thoughts, seek help.

- Poor physical health or physical disability
- Personality type
- Other mental illnesses (e.g., anxiety, dementia, schizophrenia).

It is often a combination of factors that triggers an episode of depression.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms can involve thoughts, feelings or changes in behaviour and physical signs and include:

- Feeling deeply sad, hopeless, in despair
- Loss of interest and enjoyment in life
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Major appetite and weight changes
- Tiredness, loss of energy
- Trouble thinking, concentrating and making decisions
- Feeling helpless, worthless, guilty
- Feeling restless, irritable, agitated
- Feeling very fragile and on edge
- Thoughts of suicide or death
- Problems with sexual function or loss of interest in sex
- Headaches and muscle pains.

If you have any of these symptoms, talk to your doctor. Parents are encouraged to be alert to these symptoms in teenagers.

Treatment

Treatment often involves several different strategies, depending on the type and severity of the depression.

Talking and support

Talking is often the first step in managing depression and counselling and behaviour therapies are important treatments. Local doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and some counsellors can help with these therapies.

Medicines

Antidepressant medicines can correct the balance of chemicals in the brain. There are many types of antidepressants and a person may need to try several antidepressants before finding one that suits them.

Antidepressant medicines:

- Must be prescribed by a doctor
- Relieve the physical symptoms of depression
- Are not addictive
- Are most effective when combined with counselling therapy
- May take 6-8 weeks to work, although some people see benefits sooner
- May affect alertness and may cause drowsiness
- Need to be taken regularly and must NOT be stopped suddenly. Antidepressants should only be stopped gradually, with a doctor's supervision
- Can interact with other medicines, including non-prescription and complementary medicines – ask a doctor or pharmacist
- Alcohol and certain foods must be avoided while taking some antidepressant medicines – ask a pharmacist.

Note: Consult a doctor before using complementary therapies to manage depression.

Self Care

- Learn about depression and its treatment.
- Ask for help. Depression is an illness, not a weakness.
- Some people find it helpful to write down their thoughts and feelings.
- Let family and friends know how you are feeling. Even though they may not fully understand what you're going through, they may be able to give you extra support.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Learn and practice techniques to relax your body and mind.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet.
- Exercise regularly to help improve your mood and physical health.
- Look after yourself. Do some things that you enjoy.

Getting help

There are many organisations that provide help and support for people with depression and for their families and friends. Ask a doctor or pharmacist or contact one of the organisations listed below.

Related fact cards

- *Anxiety*
- *Medicines & Driving* (website only – ask your pharmacist)
- *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Sleeping Problems*

For more information

A doctor – listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Beyond blue – phone 1300 22 4636 or website www.beyondblue.org.au

Carers Australia – phone 1800 242 636 or website www.carersaustralia.com.au

Community health and mental health centres – listed in the front of your local white pages.

depressioNet – website www.depressioNet.com.au

Kids Help Line – phone 1800 55 1800 (24 hours, Australia-wide) or website www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline – phone 13 11 14 (24 hours, Australia-wide) or website www.lifeline.org.au

Salvation Army Support Services – under 'S' in the white pages of the phone book.

The MoodGYM – website www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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