



mental health  
association nsw

# Depression

Depression is a common mental health problem and is significantly different from mere unhappiness or sadness. It is a long lasting, often recurring illness as real and debilitating as heart disease. The physical and mental effects of depression can make it hard for people to function in their daily lives.

About one million Australians experience depression each year with one in five women and one in eight men experiencing depression in their lifetime (*2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing*, Australian Bureau of Statistics).

## What Are The Symptoms?

The symptoms and the severity of feelings of depression may be different for each person. However, a person experiencing a depressive episode generally experiences both physical and psychological symptoms including:

- eating too much or too little
- sleeping too much or too little - including frequent waking during the night, difficulty getting to sleep or being unable to wake in the morning
- headaches, digestive disorders or nausea
- restlessness, agitation and irritability
- loss of interest in daily activities, a lack of energy and/or loss of sex drive
- excessive crying and being easily upset
- persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, isolation, helplessness and hopelessness
- feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- thoughts of suicide or feelings of wanting to escape from the way one is feeling
- difficulty concentrating, remembering and making decisions.

## What are the Different Types of Depressive Disorders?

There are many different terms people use to describe and categorise depression. Some common types include:

**Adjustment disorder with depressed mood** – is often triggered by stressful situations such as the loss of a job or relationship breakup. Counselling and support are helpful with this kind of depression to help the person work through the situation.

**Major clinical depression** – is a severe form of depression associated with a chemical imbalance in the brain. This can appear without apparent reason and usually lasts a minimum of two weeks. It is often associated with feelings of helplessness and despair. Medication is usually an important part of the treatment of this kind of depression.

**Dysthymic disorder** – is less severe than major depression but untreated can be continuous over many years.

### **What Are The Causes?**

Depression is thought to be the result of an interaction between a number of factors including:

- **Environmental factors**

Stress associated with certain stages of life, such as puberty, middle age or retirement; or stress resulting from personal experiences such as family breakdown, migration and unemployment.

- **Biological factors**

An imbalance of the chemicals in the brain that regulate mood and activity can alter someone's thoughts, emotions and behaviour, resulting in depression.

- **Genetic factors**

People can inherit a predisposition or vulnerability to the development of depression.

- **Personality**

Some personality types are more prone to depression, including those who set very high standards for themselves and others.

- **Thinking style**

People with depression often think in unrealistic or negative ways which may cause or maintain depression.

- **Past depressive episodes**

Once someone has experienced an episode of major depression, they are more likely to develop depression or another mental illness in the future.

- **Physical illness or medical conditions**

Some medical conditions and medications used to treat physical illnesses can trigger depression.

- **Alcohol and other recreational drugs**

Some recreational drugs can make depression worse or trigger depression in some people.

## What Help is Available?

Depression can be extremely debilitating and it is important to realise you don't have to deal with it on your own. There are a number of very successful treatments and strategies available for people with depression. These include:

- counselling and psychotherapy, including cognitive-behavioural therapy
- medication: there are many antidepressants which can be prescribed by your local doctor (GP)
- behavioural and lifestyle changes
- alternative therapies
- online therapy
  - [www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au)
  - [www.ecouch.anu.edu.au](http://www.ecouch.anu.edu.au)

## What Can I Do to Help Myself?

If you are concerned that you or someone you know may be experiencing symptoms of depression:

- find out more about depression by accessing the resources and information listed below
- see your local doctor (GP) or have an assessment conducted by a mental health professional, e.g. psychologist
- if treatment is required, discuss the options with your mental health professional and decide on a program that is right for you.

It is also important to look after your mind as well as your body by adopting a healthier lifestyle including: regular exercise, a healthy eating plan, a regular sleeping pattern and regular relaxation.

*Please note – the use of alcohol, cannabis and other recreational drugs is discouraged for anyone experiencing depression. Rather than assisting with long term recovery, these substances can cause a worsening of symptoms.*

## **Useful websites**

- [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)
- [www.crufad.com/](http://www.crufad.com/)

## **Talk To Someone**

Remember that many people experience depression. It can be very helpful to talk to a friend, relative, counsellor or psychologist so that these feelings don't end up getting beyond your control. Don't let misconceptions about mental illness stop you from seeking help.

- Contact the Mental Health Information Service :1300 794 991 for information about services in your area
- Speak to your local doctor (GP)
- Contact your local Community Health Centre (under 'Community Health' in the Business and Government White Pages)
- Contact the Australian Psychological Society (APS) on 1800 333 947 for referral to a psychologist in your area
- Contact the Counselling and Psychotherapists Association on (02) 9235 1500 for names of counsellors practising in your area
- Complete an online questionnaire and find out more about symptoms and treatments for depression at [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)



## **Telephone Interpreter Service 131 450**

If English is not your first language please call the Mental Health Information Service through the Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). This service is free to non-English speaking Australian citizens or permanent residents. TIS have access to interpreters speaking more than 120 languages and dialects.



## **Medicare Rebates and Accessing Private Practitioners**

### **What is the difference between psychiatrists and psychologists?**

Psychiatrists are medically trained doctors who specialise in the treatment of mental illness. Like GPs they can prescribe, administer and monitor medication. Psychiatrists do not advertise so it is up to your GP to refer you to someone appropriate.

Psychologists are trained in human behaviour and use a range of therapies to treat patients. They provide services including assessment, psychological testing, and various types of psychotherapy and counselling.

### **Medicare rebate for psychologists**

A Medicare rebate is now available for a number of sessions per calendar year with a registered psychologist\* with a Medicare Provider Number. To obtain the rebate you must be referred by an appropriate medical practitioner, i.e. a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician. The practitioner will ensure that you meet the eligibility requirements and develop a management plan for your condition.

The cost and rebate from Medicare can vary depending on the consultation length and fee charged. If the psychologist bulk bills there will be no extra cost.

For further information about the rebate or to locate a psychologist in your area contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au).

\* Similar Medicare rebates also exist for mental health accredited social workers and occupational therapists.

## **Mental Health Resource Centre**

The Resource Centre contains material that promotes a better understanding of mental health issues. New books and DVDs are purchased on a regular basis and visitors are welcome to come in and browse.

Members of MHA, CAG and ARAFMI may check-out resources on loan. The length of the loan is 3 weeks. Membership costs between \$10 - \$30 per individual per annum. Please note that most of the reference books are not available for loan

You will find the Resource Centre Booklist on our website: [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au) for further information contact 1300 794 991.

## **Disclaimer**

*This information is for educational purposes. As neither brochures nor websites can diagnose people it is always important to obtain professional advice and/or help when needed. The listed websites provide additional information, but should not be taken as an endorsement or recommendation.*

*This information may be reproduced with an acknowledgement to the Mental Health Association NSW. This and other fact sheets are available for download from [www.mentalhealth.asn.au](http://www.mentalhealth.asn.au). The Association encourages feedback and welcomes comments about the information provided.*

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