

Pfizer Australia

HEALTH REPORT

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DEPRESSION AND CHRONIC ILLNESS

This edition of the Pfizer Australia Health Report looks at depression and chronic illness.

Depression is a very real condition for many people living with a chronic illness, which includes conditions such as diabetes and kidney disease that are long-lasting and persistent in their symptoms or development.

This latest Pfizer Australia Health Report, produced in partnership with SANE Australia, reveals that many carers of people with chronic health conditions say they are affected by depression as well.

The research showed a quarter of carers expressed feelings of isolation with 27 percent feeling 'overwhelmed' by the condition.

The risk of depression is greatest for people with a chronic health condition who care for someone else at the same time.

Thirty-four percent of these carers rate their quality of life as fair or poor. A massive 61

percent say they experience depression, with 96 percent of this group seeing a GP for treatment.

Our report's findings are based on responses from 1,499 Australians aged 18 years and over. The research was conducted in August 2006 by independent consultants Stollznow Research in consultation with SANE Australia.

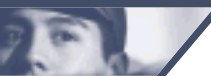
The Pfizer Australia Health Report is produced monthly, in collaboration with health consumer organisations and medical experts, and provides information and news to help you and your family live a healthier, happier lifestyle.

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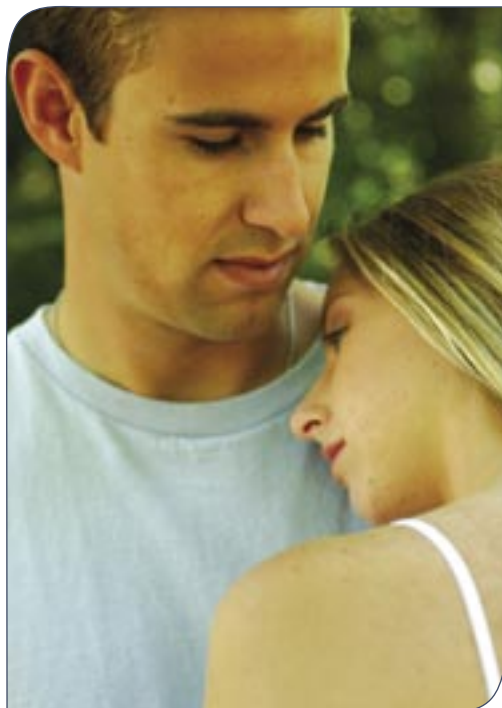
WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

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. The symptoms of depression generally react positively to treatment.

About 20 percent of people will experience a depressive illness at some time in their lives. Around six percent experience a more severe form of the illness.

Depression has a variety of symptoms and affects each person in different ways. Symptoms include: persistently feeling extremely sad or tearful; disturbances to normal sleep patterns; loss of interest and motivation; feeling worthless or guilty; loss of pleasure in activities; anxiety; changes in appetite or weight; loss of sexual interest; physical aches and pains; impaired thinking or concentration.



What is anxiety?

An anxiety disorder is a medical condition with anxiety so overwhelming it can interfere with a person's ability to function day-to-day. It is common for people to experience depression with the anxiety, or have problems with alcohol or drug abuse.

Someone with an anxiety disorder will feel distressed a lot of the time for no apparent reason. An episode can be so severe it is immobilising. The person might have:

- Persistent, excessive or unrealistic worries (generalised anxiety disorder);

- Compulsions and obsessions which they can't control (obsessive compulsive disorder);
- Intense excessive worry about social situations (social anxiety disorder);
- Panic attacks (panic disorder);
- An intense, irrational fear of everyday objects and situations (phobia).

Other symptoms of anxiety disorders may include a pounding heart; difficulty breathing; upset stomach; muscle tension; sweating or choking; feeling faint or shaky.

People with chronic illness twice as likely to develop depression

Half of all Australians living with a chronic health condition experience depression or anxiety, new national research figures reveal in this report.

This rate of mental illness is two times greater than for the general population.

The research, conducted for SANE Australia and published in the Pfizer Australia Health Report, shows that one-in-four Australians are living with chronic conditions like arthritis, back pain, heart disease and diabetes.

Thirty-eight percent of those surveyed recognise that depression and anxiety need to be treated as well as the chronic physical health condition.

Barbara Hocking, Executive Director of SANE Australia says people living with a chronic condition are more vulnerable to depression and anxiety.

It is important for those affected to understand, therefore, that this is not an inevitable part of their chronic illness, and that it can and should be treated effectively.

"Getting treatment for depression is doubly valuable, as there is strong evidence that when this happens, management of the underlying chronic health condition is also improved. Suffering in silence doesn't help either the



depression, anxiety or the underlying condition," Ms Hocking said.

"Around one-in-five Australians will experience a major depressive illness during their lifetime and this incidence increases enormously in those with a chronic health condition.

"It is important that people with these conditions seek treatment for depression and anxiety with the most effective treatment often being psychological therapy now available through Medicare," Ms Hocking said.

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This Report has been produced in partnership with SANE Australia, is an independent national charity helping people affected by mental illness through education, applied research and campaigning for improved services and attitudes. SANE conducts innovative programs to improve the lives of people living with mental illness, their family and friends. It operates a national Freecall service: **1800 18 SANE (7263)**, an online Helpline, and an award-winning website, which help thousands of people each year. More information about SANE Australia, and depression and anxiety, can be found at **www.sane.org**



EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF CHRONIC ILLNESS



There is an increased understanding that our physical and mental health are bound together.

For anyone, looking after physical well-being is very important and especially valuable for people with chronic illness. Both the health condition and its treatment can affect the way we think and feel.

The emotional impact of an illness - being sad, frightened, worried or angry, for example - can be overwhelming.

Often people may not realise they are depressed if they think the symptoms are due to the physical illness.

People are most likely to become anxious and depressed:

- When they are first told about a chronic condition;
- Before and after major surgery;
- If there are unpleasant side effects to treatment;
- If the condition returns after a period of recovery;
- If the illness stops responding to treatment.

A person may have a sense of hopelessness about the future or think that they don't want to burden those close to them with their feelings.

It's important to avoid negative patterns of thinking as they encourage further negative thoughts. There are some tips about managing depression and anxiety on page 11.

Depression and anxiety can be treated

Treatment can do much to reduce and even eliminate the symptoms of depression and anxiety. It may include a combination of psychological therapies, medication and community support.

A doctor, psychologist or other suitably qualified health professional can assess symptoms, make a diagnosis and use psychological therapies to treat these conditions.

In some cases, it can be helpful to prescribe medications that assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance and help control the symptoms of depression. Medication may be taken for a limited period, in combination with psychological therapy, or longer term where symptoms are severe or persistent.

How is SANE Australia helping?

SANE Australia has a range of helpful information resources available for those affected by mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders, including Guidebooks, Factsheets and DVDs. It also operates a national Freecall Helpline on **1800 18 SANE (7263)**, with advisors available 9.00am - 5.00pm weekdays, and an answering service available after hours.

SANE Australia is beginning work with healthcare organisations such as Kidney Health Australia to produce a customised version of its popular *SANE Guide to Depression* specially adapted to be helpful for people living with chronic illness.

The Guide will include components of the SANE Guide to Anxiety Disorders and will be a prototype for similar guides for people



living with other chronic illnesses such as arthritis, diabetes, asthma and heart disease.

An aim of the Guide will be to encourage people with chronic illness to better acknowledge and discuss their depressive symptoms with their health care team to improve management of both their depression and chronic illness.

It will also help people affected to understand and address some of the special issues they face when treating depression and anxiety, such as possible drug interactions.

For many people the ideal treatment would include a combination of medication and psychological therapy, along with access to community support programs, and education and support for families.

Appropriate recognition of and treatment for depression has the potential, therefore, to lead to a markedly improved quality of life for both the person with chronic illness and their family carers.

There's more about the SANE Guide on page 10.



REMEMBER THAT CARERS NEED CARE TOO



Depression affects more than one person

When a relative or friend develops depression and anxiety in association with a chronic illness, it can be distressing, worrying and isolating for everyone involved.

Despite the different symptoms of these mental illnesses, many family and friends share similar experiences, and there is much they can do to help the person they care for and look after themselves too.

Don't ignore the warning signs of depression and anxiety. The sooner someone receives treatment, the better the outcome is likely to be.

The person with an illness should be encouraged to see a GP for an assessment. If the person cannot understand that they are ill and refuses to see a doctor, a carer might make an appointment themselves to discuss their concerns and what can be done.

If you are a carer, find out as much as you can about depression and anxiety, their treatments and what services are available in your local area - and encourage the person with the illness to be involved in this process as much as possible. Call **1800 18 SANE (7263)** for information and advice on where to go for support.

You may find there are education and training courses specially designed to help carers carry out their role. This can be particularly helpful if the person being cared for is severely affected by their condition.

Working out a plan for coping day-by-day and for when a crisis occurs is a good strategy.

So is involving the ill person and their health professional in this. A carer needs to discuss strategies with them for when symptoms begin to recur or become worse.

Carer's guide to regaining control

Mental illness often creates a feeling of powerlessness, and developing a plan helps everyone regain a sense of control over the situation. The 'SANE Guide for Families' can help with this process.

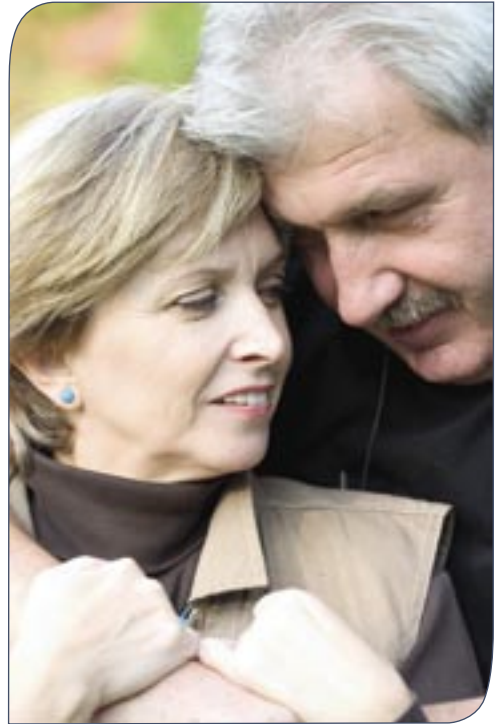
Carers should look for signs of stress in themselves, remembering that experiencing stress occasionally is quite normal.

When a person feels stressed intensively or for a long time, however, it can start to affect their physical and mental health.

Stress can be particularly harmful for people who are already vulnerable to feelings of depression or anxiety, making these feelings worse.

Remember, a person can manage their stress level by:

- Looking after themselves, physically and mentally;
- Staying in touch with family and friends;
- Keeping in contact with health professionals who can give support;



- Ensuring they get plenty of sleep and regular exercise, and;
- If they are a carer, being firm about not taking on too much responsibility for others.

Being a carer doesn't mean doing it on your own - there are support groups and services available to help. You can also have a break from caring each year, known as respite care. Contact Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres on Freecall **1800 059 059** for further information.

TAKE ACTION TO GET HELP



People living with a chronic illness not only face the demands of the illness itself, they also must contend with those imposed by the treatments for their condition, such as the side effects of medication, for example.

Illness may affect a person's mobility and independence and change the way they live, see themselves, and relate to others.

In situations like these, feelings of sadness and even despair are normal.

Depression and chronic illness often occur together either because the changes associated with the illness trigger the depression, or there is a psychological reaction to the hardships posed by the illness.

Depression and chronic illness can form a vicious circle: chronic illness can bring on episodes of depression, which can interfere

with successful treatment of the chronic condition.

Those who receive treatment for this co-occurring depression often experience an improvement in their overall medical condition, a better quality of life, and are more able to stick to their treatment plans.

Some of the steps to recovery from depression or anxiety associated with a chronic condition are outlined on the page opposite.

Chronic diseases are common: in 2004-2005, 77% of Australians had at least one long-term condition.

(Source: ABS National Health Survey 2004-2005)

Living well with chronic illness and depression

There are many important steps a person with depression or anxiety can take to get help and start feeling better sooner.

These include:

- Recognising symptoms of depression and anxiety, which are available as factsheets on the SANE website (www.sane.org);
- Talking things over with a friend and sharing fears and concerns. It can be a great relief to get worries off your chest and helps a person feel supported;
- Calling a helpline that specialises in the chronic condition involved to talk with people who understand the situation;
- Calling a Helpline such as the SANE Helpline **1800 18 SANE (7263)** to seek information and advice about depression and anxiety;
- Seeing a GP as soon as possible. Preparing a list of questions to ask during the consultation may be useful. It's important to book an extended consultation to allow enough time to talk to a doctor;
- Joining a support group relevant to the chronic condition to keep in touch with others who are having similar experiences and can share their tips on how to manage;
- Contacting Carers Australia and the Commonwealth Carelink Centre to find out what resources, supports and payments are available for a carer;
- Learning relaxation strategies such as meditation, yoga and tai chi for example.



These activities are often available through community groups in your local area.

The SANE Helpline is Australia's only national Freecall helpline providing information about symptoms, treatments, medications and support services for those affected by mental illness and their carers. Advisors are available weekdays 9.00am to 5.00pm EST with a 24 hour answering service.



NEW GUIDE A ROADMAP TO GOOD HEALTH

SANE Australia is beginning work to develop customised versions of The SANE Guide to Depression and Anxiety for people with chronic illness. These new resources will help people to:

- Understand that the depression and anxiety commonly associated with a chronic illness can be treated effectively;
- Better recognise and understand their own or their relative's depression and anxiety;
- Reach out for treatment and support for depression and anxiety;
- Understand the mental health benefits of being involved with a health organisation related to their chronic condition.

Production of the revised Guide will involve SANE Australia working in partnership with other health organisations.

For example, working together and using the original SANE Guides as the base material, Kidney Health Australia staff and members will tailor the new booklet to their needs.



This means that readers affected by kidney disease will know immediately that this resource is for them, feel reassured and less isolated and be able to absorb the content more readily.

Anne Wilson, CEO of Kidney Health Australia, says: "We are pleased to be working with SANE to develop this valuable resource. Depression is a common complication of chronic kidney disease, as with many other chronic illnesses. For those living with kidney disease, they must deal with not only the demands of the disease itself, but the treatments as well which can significantly impact on independence, mobility and lifestyle. The customised Guide on Depression and Kidney Disease will provide useful information to those living with kidney disease and also their families and carers."

Self-management vital for recovery

It's important for a person with anxiety or depression to talk to their doctor or other health professionals about strategies to help them manage their negative and worrying thoughts.

The person affected also needs to know how to check if they are being realistic and reacting in proportion to their situation.

The best treatment for mental illness, such as depression and anxiety, includes a combination of psychological therapies, medication and support in the community.

Psychological treatments help by giving an opportunity to talk about thoughts and feelings and learn new ways to think about the world with a specially trained professional.

This assists in helping a person to understand their symptoms and how to cope with them better.

It's important to remember that if a doctor prescribes medication for anxiety or depression that they are aware of the patient's chronic condition, so they can avoid possible interactions with current treatment.

A person with mild depression can begin to feel better by making time to do things that help take thoughts off their current health situation, such as crosswords, walking, yoga, meditation, or watching a film that makes them laugh.

It's also helpful to get lots of sleep, have a massage, take a warm bath, write thoughts



in a journal, and listen to relaxing music to fall asleep, rather than replaying worrying thoughts.

The key to making healthy improvements in your life is to make small changes at a time. For example, begin by walking for 30 minutes every day and when this has become a habit, then focus on introducing other changes.



USEFUL CONTACTS

SANE HELPLINE 1800 18 SANE (7263) OR helpline@sane.org

National Freecall 1800 and online service providing information and advice about all mental illnesses and their referral to local services.

MOOD GYM WEBSITE: www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

An interactive program for identifying difficult emotions and developing skills to handle them. It delivers cognitive behaviour therapy for preventing depression.

LIFELINE: 13 11 14

24 hour telephone counselling.

BEYONDBLUE: 1300 22 4636 OR www.beyondblue.org.au

The national depression initiative – information about depression and anxiety disorders and treatments.

DEPRESSIONNET WEBSITE: www.depressionnet.com.au

Online information about depression.

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE WEBSITE: www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

Online information about mood disorders.

CARERS AUSTRALIA: 1800 242 636 OR www.carersaustralia.com.au

The national peak body for carers.

COMMONWEALTH CARELINK CENTRES 1800 052 222 OR www.commcarelink.health.gov.au

A way for carers to access information about community and other aged care services.

