

SANE

FACTSHEET

DEPRESSION

QUICK FACTS

- Depression affects thinking and emotions, causing low mood and a loss of pleasure in usual activities.
- Major depressive disorder, persistent depressive disorder, and perinatal depression are all types of depressive disorders.
- People living with depression can benefit from self-care strategies, psychological therapies, and community support.
- It is possible to live a full and meaningful life even if a person experiences depression.

ABOUT DEPRESSION

Everyone experiences low mood or sadness at times – it's part of being human. But depression is more than just sadness. It is a mental health condition that significantly affects the way someone thinks and feels. It causes ongoing low mood, and/or a loss of pleasure or interest in things that someone would usually enjoy.

Depression often involves a range of other physical and psychological symptoms that can interfere with day-to-day life. It's also common for people living with depression to have other mental and physical health issues, such as: anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, personality disorders, and chronic pain.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Symptoms of depression can occur at any age. A person with depression will often feel low even if there is no obvious cause.

When people say 'depression' they are often referring to **major depressive disorder**. This involves a variety of symptoms and affects everyone in different ways. For example, symptoms can vary in severity; and some people only ever experience one episode, while for others they occur multiple times.

To receive a diagnosis of major depressive disorder, a person needs to experience five of the following symptoms over a period of at least two weeks¹:

- Feeling extremely sad, empty, hopeless, or tearful.

- Losing interest or pleasure in activities.
- Significant weight changes, or changes to appetite.
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep (insomnia), or oversleeping (hypersomnia).
- Feeling physically agitated or jittery, or slowed down.
- Fatigue, or loss of energy.
- Negative thinking, such as feeling worthless or guilty.
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.
- Thoughts of death or suicide, planning or attempting suicide.

If you, or someone you know, are concerned about suicide and need to talk to someone right now, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467. If life is in danger and you need help immediately, please call triple zero (000).

Some people with depression also have physical symptoms such as headaches or digestive problems, or a lack of sex drive. People can also experience symptoms of psychosis during a depressive episode.

There are other types of depressive disorders too¹. These include:

- **Persistent depressive disorder:** depressed mood for at least two years. This may also involve appetite changes, sleep difficulties, low energy, low self-esteem, poor concentration, or feelings of hopelessness.
- **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PDD):** around the time of menstruation, distressing mood changes (such as mood swings, feeling sad or tearful, angry, or anxious) and physical symptoms such as pain, tenderness, or bloating. Other symptoms include loss of interest in usual activities, trouble concentrating, sleep difficulties, and appetite changes. These symptoms differ from more normal premenstrual syndrome (PMS) in that they are severe enough to impact wellbeing or ability to manage usual daily activities.
- **Substance/medication-induced depressive disorder:** depressed mood or loss of pleasure that happens as a result of the use or withdrawal from a medication, alcohol or drugs.
- **Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** a pattern of depression at specific times of year, such as during winter.

CAUSES OF DEPRESSION

Depression is thought to be caused by a combination of factors. These include genetic factors, brain chemistry, personality traits, thinking patterns and traumatic experiences²⁻⁴.

Depressive episodes can also:

- be a reaction to a distressing situation like loss or stress
- be experienced during pregnancy or following the birth of a child (perinatal depression)
- occur as part of other mental health issues, like bipolar disorder

- sometimes occur without any obvious triggering event.

HOW COMMON IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is one of the most common mental health issues. Around 7.5% of Australian adults experience depressive disorders each year⁵.

Depression is more common in women than men, and higher rates occur in people with disabilities or long term health conditions⁶.

MANAGING LIFE WITH DEPRESSION

There are strategies that can help people manage the symptoms of depression:

- Understanding more about depression, why it has come up and what makes it better or worse.
- Learning strategies to manage unhelpful thoughts.
- Creating a routine and scheduling in activities that previously have given a sense of pleasure or achievement.
- Relaxation and breathing training.
- Mindfulness.
- Looking after your physical health through healthy eating, exercise and sleeping well.
- Developing a safety plan and other strategies to manage suicidal thoughts.

TREATMENT AND SUPPORT FOR DEPRESSION

Treatment can help manage, reduce, or even eliminate the symptoms of depressive disorders.

It's a good idea to first talk to a GP. A GP can provide information and refer on to other health professionals or support services. They can also explore if there are any health conditions contributing to symptoms.

Treatment often involves working with a mental health professional such as a psychologist, counsellor, or psychiatrist. Community based supports that help with study, employment or social connection can also be beneficial.

Treatment can have a range of goals. Some people might want to understand what causes or contributes to depression and its patterns. Others might learn how to manage physical symptoms of depression and reduce negative thinking.

There are several types of psychological therapies that can help manage depression, such as ^{7,8}:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Interpersonal therapy
- Behavioural activation

- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy
- Psychodynamic therapy
- Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT)

For people with more moderate to severe symptoms, or with more persistent symptoms, sometimes treatment may be longer-term. Antidepressant medication may be recommended to manage symptoms, usually alongside psychological treatments⁷.

Treatments such as electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) or repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) can also be helpful^{7,9}. Some people with a seasonal pattern of depression benefit from light therapy⁷.

HELP FOR FAMILY & FRIENDS

The family and friends of someone experiencing depression need care and support too — it's okay for family and friends to set boundaries, and to prioritise their own physical and mental health.

There are many other people out there who share similar experience, and many services designed to help carers of people with mental health issues. Check out our [Guide for Families and Friends](#) for more info.

Effective support is available, and a person who is experiencing depression can live a fulfilling life.

To connect with others who get it, visit our online Forums. They're safe, anonymous and available 24/7.

[Visit Forums](#)

RESOURCES

- [Depression self-assessment](#) (Black Dog Institute)
- Self-help resources: [Centre for Clinical Interventions workbook](#) and [online course from This Way Up](#)
- [My lightbulb moment – real story of living with depression](#)
- For support with managing suicidal thoughts, contact [Suicide Call Back Service](#) – 1300 659 467 or [Lifeline](#) – 13 11 14
- Statistics on prevalence of depression: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/mental-health/national-survey-mental-health-and-wellbeing-summary-results/2007>

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