

# Why use both psychological treatments and medications for depression?



## FACT SHEET 5

When a person is depressed, it affects both the body and the mind. It disrupts some of the body's most basic systems, making the person feel unwell. Those systems affected include the:

- Central nervous system (ie. brain function)
- Sleep-wake cycle
- Hormonal system
- Stress response system
- Immune system
- Gastrointestinal system.

It doesn't matter what causes depression, both psychological treatments and medications help to relieve the main symptoms. Different types of depression need different treatments. As well, people respond differently to different treatments. Together with your doctor or mental health professional, you can find the treatment that works best for you. Some people respond well to psychological treatments, while others respond best to medications.

### Psychological treatments can help to:

- Change your negative thoughts and feelings
- Encourage you to get involved in activities
- Speed your recovery
- Prevent depression from recurring
- Identify ways to manage your illness and stay well.

### Antidepressant medications:

- May have a physical impact
- Help to treat symptoms of depression
- Are safe, effective and not addictive
- Help you to manage your illness.

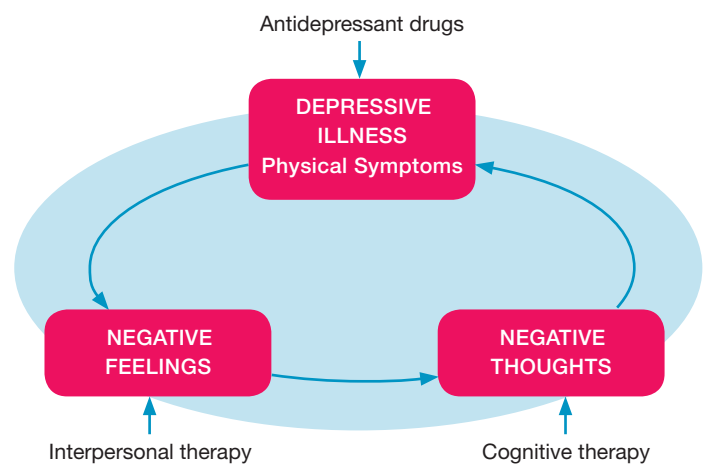
## THE EFFECTS OF TREATED AND UNTREATED DEPRESSION

The diagram below shows what happens when depression is either treated or left untreated. Psychological treatments improve coping skills by dealing with life's stressors and conflicts. Medications on the other hand, have a physical impact. They improve brain function by changing the brain's chemicals. When these two treatments are combined, they can tackle successfully the symptoms of depression. If depression isn't treated, there can be negative physical effects on the body's systems.

## USING TREATMENTS TO SUIT THE PERSON

Many treatments are available for people with depression. It is important to use psychological treatment(s) or medication(s) that work for you and are the most useful for your level of depression or anxiety. Different treatments target different parts of the depression cycle, as shown in this diagram.

### Breaking the depression cycle



Many treatments do not fix the problem. For example, sleeping tablets or simple counselling are ineffective, even though they may provide temporary relief.

Effective treatments for depression are available – both psychological treatments and medication. These treatments can relieve physical symptoms and correct negative thoughts and feelings.

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The following table gives you an idea of the range of treatments available and outlines their suitability for different degrees of depression and anxiety. For example, specific medication therapy is more useful for patients with severe depression than for those with mild depression.

	MEDICAL ASSESSMENT & REVIEW	EDUCATION	PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY	SPECIFIC MEDICATION THERAPY
Mild depression	✓	✓	✓	–
Moderate depression	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Severe depression	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓*	✓✓✓
Mixed depression & anxiety	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓
Mild anxiety	✓	✓	✓	–
Moderate anxiety	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓
Severe anxiety	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓

Key: ✓ – mild benefits; ✓✓ – moderate benefits; ✓✓✓ – most benefits.

\* N.B. If people are severely depressed they may be unable to participate in psychological treatment, such as problem solving or changing negative self-thoughts, until they have responded to drug therapy.

Source: Hickie et al. Educational Health Solutions; 2000. Reproduced with permission www.spheregp.com.au.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR ILLNESS AND TREATMENT

You, your family and close friends need to have a good understanding about treatments for depression. Having this information helps you to:

- Recognise your symptoms
- Understand their relationship to stress
- Work towards recovery.

You can help yourself by:

- Reading the information on *beyondblue's* fact sheets and website.
- Asking your doctor questions
- Reading books, pamphlets and other websites on depression
- Contacting self-help groups.

## MORE INFORMATION

*beyondblue* Fact sheet 10: Changing your thinking – Information on thinking patterns, cognitive therapies, relationship-based and other therapies.

*beyondblue* Fact sheet 11: Antidepressant medication.

*beyondblue* SSRI Fact sheet: Antidepressants for the treatment of depression in children and adolescents. A fact sheet for parents and other carers.

To read an article on treating depression, see:

'Treating depression: the *beyondblue* guidelines for treating depression in primary care.' – *Medical Journal of Australia* (2002) at: [www.mja.com.au/public/issues/176\\_10\\_200502/ell10082\\_fm.html](http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/176_10_200502/ell10082_fm.html)

Written by Ellis and Smith, this article provides evidence-based treatment guidance across the range of depressive disorders and shows where specialist treatment and primary care is indicated. Download the article to learn more.

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