

# Understanding depression



Depression is more than just a low mood – it’s a serious illness. People with depression find it hard to function every day. Depression has serious effects on *physical* and *mental* health.

## HOW DO YOU KNOW IF A PERSON IS DEPRESSED AND NOT JUST SAD?

A person may be depressed, if **for more than two weeks** they have:

- felt sad, down or miserable most of the time

**OR**

- lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities.

**AND** experienced symptoms in **at least three of the following four categories:**

### 1. Behaviour

- Stopping going out
- Not getting things done at work
- Withdrawing from close family and friends
- Relying on alcohol and sedatives
- No longer doing things they enjoyed
- Unable to concentrate

### 2. Thoughts

- “I’m a failure.”
- “It’s my fault.”
- “Nothing good ever happens to me.”
- “I’m worthless.”
- “Life’s not worth living.”

### 3. Feelings

- Overwhelmed
- Guilty
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- No confidence
- Unhappy
- Indecisive
- Disappointed
- Miserable
- Sad

### 4. Physical

- Tired all the time
- Sick and run down
- Headaches and muscle pains
- Churning gut
- Sleep problems
- Loss or change of appetite
- Significant weight loss or gain

In most cases, depression will go on for weeks or months if left untreated. If it isn’t properly treated, depression is highly likely to recur.

## WHAT MAKES A PERSON MORE AT RISK OF DEPRESSION?

**Some events or situations have been linked with depression:**

- family conflict
- isolation or loneliness
- unemployment
- having a serious medical illness
- drug and alcohol use
- brain and chemical changes
- having a family member with depression.

It’s important to remember that each person is different and it is often a combination of factors that puts a person at risk of depression.

## HOW COMMON IS DEPRESSION?

Very common. Around one million Australian adults and 100,000 young people live with depression each year.

On average, one in five people will experience depression in their lives; one in four females and one in six males.

## WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION?

Depression is often not recognised or treated.

Different types of depression require different types of treatments. This may include physical exercise for preventing and treating mild depression, through to psychological and drug treatments for more severe levels of depression.

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## PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENTS

Psychological treatments deal with problems that particularly affect people with depression, such as changing negative patterns of thinking or sorting out relationship difficulties.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) helps to correct negative thought patterns. CBT is a structured program which recognises that the way people think affects the way they feel.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) is a structured program with a specific focus on improving relationships.

Psychological treatments can help to:

- change negative thoughts and feelings
- encourage the person to get involved in activities
- speed the person's recovery
- prevent depression from recurring
- identify ways to manage the illness and stay well.

## MEDICATIONS

People who are depressed often feel physically unwell.

Antidepressant drug treatments relieve the physical symptoms of depression.

Drug treatments for depression are not addictive.

Many people worry about the potential side-effects of antidepressant medication. It's important to know that when depression isn't treated effectively, physical health often gets worse.

## THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO FIND A TREATMENT THAT WORKS.

Many things that people try don't treat the cause of the illness. For example, sleeping tablets or simple counselling are ineffective, even though they may provide temporary relief.

There is a range of treatments that are proven to work. Each person needs to find the treatment that's right for them.

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## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP?

People with depression don't get better on their own. They may need to get help with the support of their family, friends and/or health professional eg. a doctor or psychologist. Visit [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and click on [Find a Doctor](#). Recovery from depression is common. Delaying treatments may delay recovery.

## YOU CAN HELP SOMEONE BY:

- assisting them to get information from a website or library
- suggesting they go to a doctor or health professional
- assisting them to make an appointment
- accompanying them to their appointment with a doctor or health professional
- following them up after the appointment
- encouraging or getting them involved in social activities
- discouraging them from treating themselves with alcohol or other drugs.

## IT WOULD BE UNHELPFUL TO:

- put pressure on them by telling them to 'snap out of it' or 'get their act together'
- stay away or avoid them
- tell them they just need to stay busy or get out more
- pressure them to party more or wipe out how they're feeling with drugs and alcohol.

If you or someone you know needs help, talk to your family doctor or another health professional about getting appropriate treatment.

## RECOMMENDED DEPRESSION WEBSITES

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Information on depression, anxiety and bipolar disorder

[www.ybblue.com.au](http://www.ybblue.com.au)

beyondblue's website for young people

[moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://moodgym.anu.edu.au)

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to prevent depression

[www.crufad.unsw.edu.au](http://www.crufad.unsw.edu.au)

Information about depression, anxiety and its management

[www.climate.tv](http://www.climate.tv) (interactive e-health)

Self-management system for people with depression and anxiety