



What is depression?

Depression is characterised by severe and prolonged feelings of sadness, dejection and hopelessness.

One in four women and one in six men will suffer from depression at some point in their lives. Depression is a complicated illness, which can involve a number of contributing factors - genes, environment, diet, lifestyle, brain chemicals, psychology and personality.

Depressive Symptoms

Generally, the symptoms of depression include:

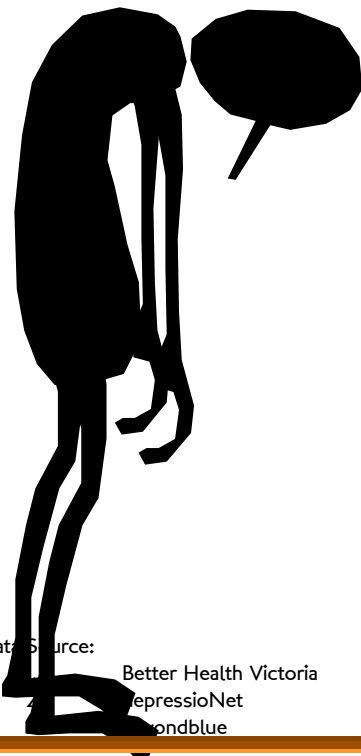
- Feeling sad, hopeless and despairing
- A loss of interest and pleasure in normal activities
- Loss of appetite or weight
- Loss of sex drive
- Sleeping problems, such as an inability to get to sleep or early waking
- Feeling physically tired all the time
- Concentration difficulties
- Feeling guilty and worthless
- Feeling that life isn't worth living.



Risk factors

Depression is thought to be caused by a combination of physical, emotional, biochemical, psychological, genetic and social factors. It is often impossible to track down and identify each contributing element. Some of the risk factors may include:

- A life-changing event, such as the loss of a loved one or the arrival of a new baby
- Chronic illness
- Certain medications, including some high blood pressure drugs
- Alcohol abuse
- A history of child abuse
- Sustained problems at home or at work





- Physical trauma
- Other family members with a prior history of depression
 - Chronic stress or anxiety.

Types of Depression

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder used to be called manic-depression. A person with bipolar disorder can swing from extreme mood states of invincible elation to paralysing despair and back again. During the manic phase, the person is optimistic and buoyed by exaggerated feelings of wellbeing. During the depressive phase, the person feels despairing and may contemplate suicide.

Cyclothymic disorder

Cyclothymic disorder is characterised by mild and alternating mood swings of elation and depression that are not debilitating enough to motivate the person to seek medical help. The periods of elation and depression can each last for lengthy periods, such as a few months.

Dysthymic disorder

Dysthymic disorder is defined as long-term depression that affects a person's quality of life, but not their ability to participate in usual work, family and social activities. The person may experience fatigue, sleeping and eating problems, and be plagued by low self-esteem, guilt and negative thinking. Cognitive difficulties include concentration and memory problems.

Major depression

A person suffering from major depression experiences most of the general symptoms listed for depression, and finds that these severely impact on their daily lives. Feelings of despair and hopelessness are pervasive, energy levels are extremely low and there is little motivation to do even the simplest of daily tasks. Hypersensitivity, paranoia, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts are all common symptoms of major depression. It is important to get immediate help to stay safe if suicidal thoughts start to become intentions.

Postnatal depression (PND)

Around one in eight new mothers experience serious PND. Usually, the depression begins during the first year of parenthood, and ranges in severity from mild to severe. Contributing factors may include:

- The hormonal upheaval of pregnancy, birth and lactation
- Physical exhaustion from broken sleep
- Loss of independence
- Financial pressures
- Altered relationships with partner, family and friends.

Data Source:

1. Better Health Victoria
2. depressioNet
3. beyondblue

Depression



Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

Depression is more common in the winter months and in the northern hemisphere, which suggests to some researchers that brain chemistry is affected by sunlight exposure. Certain studies have shown that light hitting the back of the eye (retina) stimulates the brain to make mood enhancing chemicals. Apart from depression, other characteristics of SAD include eating more and gaining weight, excessive sleeping and withdrawing from others. Usually, a person with SAD comes out of their *hibernation* in the spring.

Depression Treatment

Treatment options

Treatment for depression depends on the type, cause and severity. It is important that you discuss treatment options with your doctor and follow their advice, particularly about combining different treatments. Treatment may include:

- Medications for treating bipolar disorder, including mood stabilising drugs, such as lithium carbonate.
- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) or interpersonal relationship therapy.
- Regular exercise and a healthy, balanced diet.
- Stress management techniques.
- Natural therapies.
- Addressing any contributing problems, such as relationship difficulties.
- Counselling, including psychotherapy.
- In the case of SAD, bright light therapy (BLT) may be used to stimulate the brain to make mood enhancing chemicals.
- Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), in cases of severe, life threatening depression that don't respond to other forms of treatment.
- Hospitalisation, in the case of threatened suicide or suicide attempt.



Where to get help...

If you need any help with stress in your life, there are a number of places to call or websites to visit.

Website Information:

1. BeyondBlue - www.beyondblue.org.au
2. National Mental Health Council – www.mhca.org.au

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Phone Assistance:

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| 1. Lifeline (local call cost) | 13 11 14 |
| 2. Kids Help Line | 1800 55 18 00 |
| 3. Just Ask Infoline | 1300 13 11 14 |
| 4. SANE Australia | 1800 68 83 82 |
| 5. Mensline | 1300 78 99 78 |
| 6. Mental Health Direct | 1800 22 04 00 |
| 7. Samaritans Help | 1800 19 83 13 |
| 8. Psychiatric Emergency Team | 1800 67 68 22 |

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