

# DEPRESSION

Everyone has a bad day now and then. Feeling sad, unhappy and generally in low spirits often occurs after a disappointing or distressing event.

However, for some people these feelings may become more than just short term unhappiness. Long-lasting changes in mood, feelings and behaviour can develop into depression. It is a serious and common condition that *can* be treated. Depression is much more than normal grief and affects a person's lifestyle, mental and physical health.

Depression can occur in anyone at any age. It is more common in people with a family history of depression and it is thought to be partly due to a chemical imbalance in the brain.

While it can occur without an obvious cause, many factors may contribute to depression:

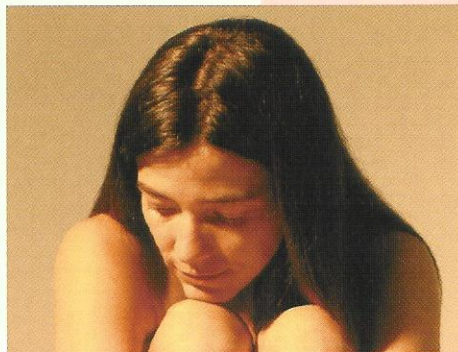
- **Emotional stress** – e.g. loss of a loved one, a relationship breakdown.
- **Hormonal changes** – e.g. after childbirth (post-natal depression).
- **Medicines** – including some:
  - high blood pressure and heart medicines
  - cancer medicines
  - psychiatric medicines
  - pain relievers.

Alcohol and some drugs of abuse (e.g. amphetamines) can also contribute to depression.

- **Medical conditions** – including thyroid and other hormone problems, infections such as HIV, some cancers, stroke, and arthritis. Coping with pain and physical disabilities or a terminal illness may also cause depression.

Depression may be influenced by the type of person you are, how you cope with things and the support you have around you.

Depression may occur with other mental illnesses including anxiety, schizophrenia, dementia and alcoholism.



## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- feeling deeply sad and hopeless
- loss of interest and enjoyment in life
- difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- major appetite and weight changes
- tiredness, loss of energy
- trouble concentrating and making decisions
- feeling helpless or worthless
- feeling restless, irritable and/or agitated
- feeling very fragile and on edge
- thoughts of suicide or death
- problems with sexual function or loss of interest in sex
- aches and pains, although no physical illness can be found.

If you have any of these symptoms and don't know why, or they are affecting your life, talk to your doctor.

## IMPORTANT

- Feeling grief or sadness after a major life event is normal. However, it is important to seek help if feelings become overwhelming.
- Feelings of hopelessness and despair can lead to thoughts of suicide and self harm. These thoughts are serious and help is available (see the contact section).

## TREATMENT

Effective treatment is available for depression. Treatment will depend on the cause of your depression and how severe it is.

## Talking and support

Discuss how you feel with a health professional experienced in depression (e.g. your family doctor, a psychiatrist, psychologist, or counsellor) or someone you feel comfortable with.

Talking is often the first step in managing depression. This alone may help in treating your depression or medicines may also be used.

## Medicines

Antidepressant medicines work to get brain chemicals back in balance. There are many different types of antidepressants and no particular one is ideal for every person with depression. You may need to try a few antidepressants before you find one that works best for you.

- Antidepressant medicines:
  - are not addictive
  - may help with counselling therapy
  - may take up to a month to work fully, although some people see benefits sooner.
- may affect alertness and may cause drowsiness (see *Medicines & Driving* Fact Card).
- can interact with other medicines, including non-prescription medicines such as cold & flu and herbal preparations. Always tell your pharmacist and doctor if you are taking a medicine for depression or any other condition.
- Alcohol and certain foods must be avoided while taking some antidepressant medicines. Talk to your pharmacist.
- Antidepressant medicines need to be taken regularly. Don't stop taking them without your doctor's advice.
- If you feel your medicine isn't working or you are having side effects, talk to your doctor and pharmacist - there are many antidepressant medicines available.

## SELF CARE

- Become informed about depression and the options available for treatment.
- Ask for help if you need it. Depression is an illness, not a weakness.
- Some people find it helps to write down their thoughts. Try keeping a diary of how you feel.
- Let family and friends know how you're feeling. Even though they may not fully understand what you're going through, they may be able to give you the extra support you need.
- Learn to relax – read the *Relaxation Techniques* Fact Card.
- Look after yourself. Eat healthy food and exercise regularly.

## Getting help

There are many places that provide help and support for people with all types of depression and their families. See the **Contact** section on this card and talk to your doctor and pharmacist.

### Recommended reading:

BURROWS GD, STANALEY R, NORMAN TR  
*Stress, Anxiety and Depression*  
ADIS Press, 1999

### Other relevant Fact Cards:

- *Anxiety*
- *Medicines & Driving*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Sleeping Badly*
- *Preventing Falls*

### Contact:

Mental Health Foundation of Australia (03) 9427 0407

Community health and mental health services – listed in the front of your local white pages

A **psychologist** – listed under "P" in the yellow pages of the phone book, or the Australian Psychological Society - ph. 1800 333 497

**Lifeline** – 131 114 (24 hours, Australia-wide)

**Salvation Army Support Services** – under "S" in the white pages of the phone book

**Post and Ante Natal Depression Association**  
Phone (03) 9882 5756

**Your Self Care pharmacist.** ACT (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Your Self Care pharmacist

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