

Youth Mental Health Factsheet

Depression

What is Depression?

It is normal to feel hard emotions, like disappointment or sadness, when you experience a difficult situation – like doing badly in an exam or fighting with your friend.

But for some people, these hard emotions can happen more often than positive emotions. When you have depression, these feelings become overwhelming and affect not only how you feel, but also how you think and what you do.

You **may** have depression if for more than two weeks, you have felt sad or low for most of that time, have lost interest in your usual activities and interactions, and have experienced at least three of the signs and symptoms listed below. If you think you may have depression, it is important to speak to your Doctor or GP and discuss with them a mental health plan.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

- **Thinking:**
Negative thoughts such as “I’m worthless,” “I hate my life,” “I’m a failure,” “Nothing good ever happens to me,” “People would be better off without me.” Thoughts of suicide or harming yourself.
- **Feeling:**
Frustrated, unhappy, disappointed, overwhelmed, guilty, angry, sad.
- **Behaviour:**
Not going out, falling behind in school work, not socialising with friends and family, using alcohol or drugs to get through the day, giving up hobbies, lack of concentration.
- **Physical:**
Sleeping problems (can’t sleep or sleeping a lot), headaches, feeling sick, tired, stomach issues, appetite change (excessive eating or not eating at all), weight loss or gain, crying for no known reason.

When Depression becomes a Problem

Depression becomes an illness when feelings of sadness last longer than normal and you stop enjoying things you used to. Often other symptoms start to develop, and it can become harder to focus on school and work, and it can interfere with your relationships with family and friends.

It is important that if you have depression you get help as soon as possible. If depression is left untreated, you risk impacting all areas of your life – you risk struggling in your studies or work, having difficulties in your relationships with family or friends, or abusing alcohol and drugs as a coping mechanism. If depression becomes severe, you may feel hopeless and begin to have thoughts of harming yourself.

There are many famous people who have or had depression: Katy Perry, Lady Gaga, Michael Phelps, J.K. Rowling, Adam Goodes, Robin Williams and Harrison Ford are just a few. 6.3% of Australians aged 16-24 years are affected by depressive disorder in a given year, you are not alone in this!¹

“For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you future and a hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11

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1. Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing: Summary of results. Canberra ABS; 2008.

What Causes Depression?

People often think that depression is caused by something going wrong in their life, like failing a subject at school, ending a relationship or seeing their parents get divorced. But depression does not normally occur from one life event, it is often due to multiple factors. The exact cause of depression is unknown, but there are some factors that are linked with its development.

- **Life Events:**

Loss of a loved one, traumatic experience, abuse or family conflict.

- **Personal Factors:**

Personality, family history, drug and alcohol use, or serious medical illness.

- **Biological:**

Changes in the brain and chemical make up in the body

What Help is Available?

Depression is different for everyone, so it is important to speak to your Doctor or GP and get a mental health plan written up that is specifically tailored for you.

There are a range of effective treatments which can help you manage your depression. These can include a combination of psychological therapies (seeing a psychologist or counsellor, attending group therapy), medication (such as antidepressants), family support, online support groups and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It may take trial and error to find the right treatment plan or psychologist for you, and that's okay, don't give up! Treatment takes time, so be kind to yourself.

How Can I Help Myself?

It is important that you have the help of a professional when it comes to getting treatment for depression. But there are some things you can do to help yourself understand and manage your depression. While seeing a doctor is important, a balanced diet and exercise is also vital for managing your mental health. Research suggests that exercising regularly increases serotonin and helps regulate mood, appetite and sleep.²

The following online resources will also give you great information and guidance in how to help your depression:

- **Reach Out:**

www.au.reachout.com

They also have an online forum where you can chat to others.

- **Headspace:**

www.headspace.org.au

They provide free online and phone counselling, and have treatment centres located all around Australia that you can visit.

- **Kids Help Line:**

www.kidshelpline.com.au

Kids Helpline is a support service for young people aged 5-25. They provide free online and phone counselling and are available 24/7. You can also request the same counsellor every time.

- **Head to Health:**

www.headtohealth.gov.au

- **Mood Gym:**

www.moodgym.com.au

Provides help with depression and anxiety. Workbooks, helpful guides.

Apps available

- **Mood Path**

- **Moodflow**

- **Beyond Blue:**

www.beyondblue.org.au

Provides information on depression and anxiety, including symptom checklists and details of additional support services.

“For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans for peace and not for evil, to give you future and a hope.”

Jeremiah 29:11

“Even though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Psalm 23:4