

**What this Fact Sheet covers:**

- Distinguishing between clinical depression & an occasional 'down' mood
- Symptoms of depression
- When to seek help for depression
- Key points to remember

Distinguishing depression from an occasional 'down' mood

Depression is a common experience. We have all felt 'depressed' about a friend's cold shoulder, misunderstandings in our marriage, tussles with teenage children - sometimes we feel 'down' for no reason at all.

However, depression can become an illness when:

- The mood state is severe;
- It lasts for 2 weeks or more; and
- It interferes with our ability to function at home or at work.

Symptoms of depression

Signs of a depressed mood include:

- Lowered self-esteem (or self-worth)
- Change in sleep patterns, that is, insomnia or broken sleep
- Change in appetite or weight
- Less ability to control emotions such as pessimism, anger, guilt, irritability and anxiety
- Varying emotions throughout the day, for example, feeling worse in the morning and better as the day progresses
- Reduced capacity to experience pleasure: you can't enjoy what's happening now, nor look forward to anything with pleasure. Hobbies and interests drop off.
- Reduced pain tolerance: you are less able to tolerate aches and pains and may have a host of new ailments
- Changed sex drive: absent or reduced
- Poor concentration and memory: some people are so impaired that they think that they are going demented
- Reduced motivation: it doesn't seem worth the effort to do anything, things seem meaningless
- Lowered energy levels.

When to seek help for depression

If you have the feelings described above and they persist for most of every day for two weeks or longer, and interfere with your ability to manage at home and at



work, then you might benefit from getting an assessment by a skilled professional.

Having one or other of these features, by themselves, is unlikely to indicate depression, however there could be other causes which may warrant medical assessment.

If you are feeling suicidal it is very important to seek immediate help, preferably by a mental health practitioner.

Key points to remember:

- Feeling depressed occasionally is a common experience.
- If feelings of depression are severe, last for 2 weeks or more, and functioning at home or at work is impaired, a professional assessment should be sought.
- If feeling suicidal, seek immediate help from a mental health practitioner such as a General Practitioner, a Psychiatrist or a Psychologist.

Where to get more information:

- www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- www.depressionet.com.au
- www.beyondblue.org.au
- www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- www.healthinsite.gov.au
- <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/Publishing.nsf/Content/Mental+Health+and+Wellbeing-1>
- <http://auseinet.flinders.edu.au>
- www.infrapsych.com



Other Fact Sheets Available:

Fact sheets on depression

- Types of depression
- Depression in teenagers & young adults
- Depression in older people
- Depression during pregnancy and the postnatal period
- Causes of depression
- Treatments for depression
- Self-testing for depression

Fact sheets on Bipolar Disorder

- Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder
- Causes of Bipolar Disorder
- Treatments for Bipolar Disorder
- Self-testing for Bipolar Disorder

Other relevant fact sheets

- Helping someone who has a mood disorder – for family & friends
- What to expect from a mental health consultation

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