

Depression in men

FACT SHEET 12



Depression affects both men and women, but quite often what they experience and how they respond is different.

Men are more likely than women to recognise and describe the physical symptoms of depression, such as feeling tired or losing weight. They may also acknowledge feeling irritable or angry, rather than saying they feel low.

Because of this, depression in men is often not picked up by themselves or by others – including doctors. If depression is not detected, it can't be treated and then it has the potential to become severe and disabling.

Depression is a known high risk factor for suicide. From 1998 to 2002, the suicide rate in Australia was four times higher in men than women.

It's vital that more people learn to recognise depression in men because depression is treatable and effective treatments are available.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

- Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness that requires attention.
- People with depression find it hard to function every day.
- Depression can have serious effects on physical and mental health.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF SOMEONE IS DEPRESSED AND NOT JUST SAD?

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

1. Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, OR
2. Lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities

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

1. Behaviour

- General slowing down or restlessness
- Neglecting responsibilities and not looking after themselves
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Becoming confused, worried and agitated
- Inability to find pleasure in any activity
- Finding it difficult to get motivated in the morning
- Behaving differently from usual
- Denying depressive feelings – this can be used as a defence mechanism

2. Thoughts

- Indecisiveness
- Loss of self-esteem
- Persistent suicidal thoughts
- Talking negatively e.g. "I'm a failure.", "It's my fault.", "Life isn't worth living."
- Worrying about finances
- Perceived change of status within the family

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3. Feelings

- Moodiness or irritability – this can come across as anger or aggression
- Sadness, hopelessness or emptiness
- Feeling overwhelmed, worthless or guilty

4. Physical Symptoms

- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Feeling tired all the time
- Unexplained headaches, backache or similar complaints
- Digestive upsets, nausea, changes in bowel habits
- Agitation, hand-wringing, pacing
- Loss or change of appetite
- Significant weight loss or gain

Everyone experiences some or all of these symptoms from time to time, but when symptoms are severe and lasting, it's time to get professional medical help.

Early detection and treatment may help to keep depression from becoming severe. Depression is treatable and effective treatments are available.

FACTORS WHICH CAN CONTRIBUTE TO DEPRESSION IN MEN

- Using drugs and alcohol
- Physical health problems
- Relationship problems
- Employment problems
- Social isolation
- Significant change in living arrangements (e.g. separation or divorce)

Studies show that men are at greater risk of their depression going unrecognised and untreated when compared to women. This is thought to relate to several factors.

Men generally tend to put off getting help for health problems, as they may think they are supposed to be tough, self-reliant, manage pain and take charge of situations. This can make it hard for men to acknowledge they have a health problem, especially a mental health problem. It is also very common for men in particular, to manage their symptoms by using alcohol and other drugs which make the symptoms worse.

HOW COMMON IS DEPRESSION?

Very common. Around one million Australian adults live with depression each year. On average, one in six men and one in four women will experience depression in their adult lifetime.

It's important that men seek treatment for depression as untreated depression may become more severe, and in some cases, can lead to suicide.

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION?

Depression is treatable

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

At www.beyondblue.org.au there is a depression checklist which when completed will indicate if you, or the person you're concerned about, may have depression. There is also information about available treatments that are proven to be effective.

It's important to seek help early. A doctor will be able to tell if a person is depressed and may assist the person or refer them to a psychiatrist or psychologist for specialist mental health treatment.



Psychological treatments

Psychological treatments address issues that particularly affect people with depression.

- **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. CBT teaches people to think rationally about common difficulties.
- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)** is a structured program with a specific focus on improving relationships. People with depression may sometimes be easily upset by other people's comments. They may feel criticised when no criticism was intended. IPT helps people find new ways to get along with others.

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.

For more information go to www.beyondblue.org.au and see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 10 "[Changing your thinking](#)".

Medications

If someone is only mildly or moderately depressed, psychological treatment alone may be effective. However, if depression is severe, medication is often necessary as well.

Medical research indicates that depression is often associated with an imbalance of certain chemicals in the brain. Antidepressants help rebalance these chemicals. Antidepressants take several weeks to have their full effect and should never be stopped unless a doctor is consulted.

HOW TO GET TREATMENT

There are some things men can do to get the treatment they need.

Be proactive: As with physical health problems, the earlier men get help, the faster they can recover. That's why it's very important to get help at the first sign of any problems.

Be direct: It's important to give the doctor or mental health professional the full picture. Writing down feelings or questions before seeing a mental health professional can help men be more direct and makes it less likely they will forget to tell the doctor the important things. As a way of raising the issue when visiting the doctor, it may be useful to take a completed depression checklist along, such as the one on the *beyondblue* website. Go to www.beyondblue.org.au and click on [Do you have depression?](#)

Finding the right mental health professional is very important. If a person doesn't feel comfortable with their doctor or other health professional, or suspects their mental health isn't being managed effectively, they should choose another doctor or get a second opinion.

On the *beyondblue* website, there is a list of doctors who have completed special mental health training and have expertise in treating depression and anxiety-related disorders. Go to www.beyondblue.org.au and click on [Find a Doctor](#).

Be persistent: For some people, it can take a while before they feel well again. It's important to stick with treatment plans and let the doctor know when things aren't working or if the person is experiencing side-effects. This is important for a person's long-term recovery. Go to www.beyondblue.org.au and see the *beyondblue* Fact Sheet on [antidepressants](#).

With psychological or medical treatment, people can recover. Go to www.beyondblue.org.au and see *beyondblue* Fact Sheet 5 "[Why use both psychological treatments and medications for depression?](#)".

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WHERE TO GET HELP

- **A doctor** who is a general practitioner (GP) is a good first port of call. In some cases, the person may be referred to a mental health specialist like a psychiatrist or psychologist. For a list of GPs with expertise in treating depression and related disorders visit the *beyondblue* website www.beyondblue.org.au and click on [Find a Doctor](#).
- **Psychiatrists** are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychological assessments, conduct medical tests and prescribe medication. Some psychiatrists use psychological treatments like CBT or IPT.
- **Psychologists** specialise in providing non-medical (psychological) treatment for depression and related disorders. To find a psychologist, contact your local Community Health Centre or for a referral to a private psychologist, contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 or www.psychology.org.au/psych/referral_service

beyondblue: the national depression initiative

www.beyondblue.org.au

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and where to get help

***beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636**

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and referral only (local call)

www.ybblue.com.au

beyondblue's website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend

Suicide Helpline – Victoria

1300 651 251 or www.suicidehelpline.org.au

24 hour counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral (local call)

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W: www.beyondblue.org.au

Mensline Australia

1300 789 978 or www.menslineaus.org.au

24 hour support for men with family and relationship problems especially around family breakdown or separation – this service provides anonymous telephone support, information and referral. (local call)

Lifeline

13 11 14

24 hour counselling, information and referral (local call)

Lifeline's "Just Ask"

1300 13 11 14

Rural Mental Health Information Service

Moodgym

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Online psychological therapy

Climate.tv – interactive e-health

www.climate.tv

Developed by medical experts, this is a self-management system for people with depression and anxiety.

CRUFAD

www.crufad.org

Information about depression, anxiety and its management

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Depression in men is common and treatable.
- Help is available.
- With the right treatment, most people recover from depression.
- It's important to seek help early – the sooner the better.
- Depression is an illness, not a weakness and men shouldn't feel ashamed to seek help.