

Depression - an overview

Everyone can feel sad, particularly when faced with loss or grief. Depression, however, is more than low mood and sadness at a loss. It is a serious medical illness. It is the result of chemical imbalances in the brain. The sufferer feels extremely sad, dejected and unmotivated.

Depression is common

One in four women and one in six men suffer from depression at some time in their life. Only about 20 per cent of people are correctly diagnosed, because depression can mask itself as a physical illness (like chronic pain, sleeplessness or fatigue).

The symptoms of depression

Some of the symptoms of depression can include:

- Feeling sad or depressed
- A loss of interest and pleasure in normal activities
- Loss of appetite or weight
- Inability to get to sleep or waking up early
- Feeling tired all the time
- Having trouble concentrating
- Feeling restless, agitated, worthless or guilty
- Feeling that life isn't worth living.

A combination of factors

Depression results from a combination of physical and psychological factors, which cause chemical imbalances in the brain. Diagnosis in every case needs a careful analysis of causes.

Physical causes include:

- Mental illness and treatment
- Inherited traits
- Chemical changes
- Drug or alcohol abuse.

Psychological causes include:

- Life stress
- Negative experiences and loss
- High anxiety.

Seek help if you experience symptoms of depression

If you experience some or most of the symptoms of depression, it is important to seek advice from a doctor or counsellor.

Type of help available

Careful medical and psychological evaluation is needed to determine the best treatment. This may include:

- Drug therapy with antidepressants
- Psychological therapies
- Education and counselling
- Avoiding situations which may contribute to the depression.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your community health centre
- AREFEMI (Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill) Tel. (03) 9889 1777
- Mood Disorders Support Group – MHFA(Vic)

Things to remember

- Depression is a constant feeling of dejection and loss, which stops you doing your normal activities.
- Depression can be mistaken for a physical illness, such as fatigue.
- Antidepressants can help most depressed people, but they must be accompanied by psychological therapy and education.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Mental Health Foundation of Australia

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