

Depression in men

Depression affects both men and women, but quite often what they experience and how they respond is different. Men tend to focus on the physical symptoms, such as feeling tired or losing weight. They are also more likely to say they feel irritable or angry, rather than saying they feel low.

Because men are less likely than women to talk about their moods or how they feel emotionally, their depression is often not picked up by themselves or by others, including their doctors. If depression is not detected, it cannot be treated and can then become severe and disabling.

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

Depression is a common, serious illness

Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness that requires attention. People with depression find it hard to manage everyday activities. Depression can have serious effects on physical as well as mental health.

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.

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.

Symptoms of depression A person may be depressed if they have felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, or lost interest in the things they usually enjoy, for more than two weeks.

There are many possible symptoms of depression and everyone experiences these symptoms from time to time, but when symptoms are severe and long lasting, it's time to get professional medical help. Below is a list of possible symptoms:

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

Early detection and treatment may help to keep depression from becoming severe. Depression is treatable and effective treatments are available. You can use the beyondblue checklist to see if you, or the person you're concerned about, may have depression.

Causes of depression

Factors that can contribute to depression in men include:

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

Men are less likely to seek help for depression

Studies show that men are at greater risk of their depression going unrecognised and untreated compared to women. This may be because men:

- May tend to put off getting help for health problems. This could be because they 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.
- Men often try to manage their symptoms of depression by using alcohol and other drugs, which make the symptoms worse.

Treatments

Depression is treatable. Different types of depression require different types of treatment. This may include physical exercise to prevent and treat mild depression, through to psychological treatments or drug treatments (or both) for moderate or severe depression.

It's important to seek help early. A doctor will be able to tell if you, or the person you are concerned about, are depressed. They will be able to help you or refer you to a psychiatrist or psychologist for specialist mental health treatment.

Different treatments include:

- **Psychological treatments** – these treatments help you to look at the issues in your life that may be leading to or causing depression. Different approaches may be used; for example, the psychologist may help you to look at how you think about issues in your life and help you explore new ways to see these things. They may also help you to look at your relationships with other people and how they could be improved.
- **Medications** – for severe depression, psychological treatments may not be enough; medication may be necessary as well. 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 you should never stop taking them without seeing your doctor.

How to get treatment

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

- **Be proactive** – the earlier you get help, the faster you 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. Write down feelings or questions before you see a mental health professional. This can help you be more direct and makes it less likely that you'll forget to tell the doctor the important things about your symptoms.
- **Find the right mental health professional for you** – you need to feel comfortable with the person who is helping you. If you don't feel okay with your first choice, choose another doctor or get a second opinion.
- **Don't give up** – sometimes it can take a while before you feel well again. It's important to stick with treatment plans and let the doctor know when things aren't working or if you are experiencing side effects. This is important for your long-term recovery.

Where to get help

- **Your doctor** – the beyondblue website has a list of doctors who have completed special mental health training and have expertise in treating depression and anxiety-related disorders
- **Psychiatrist** – your doctor can refer you to a specialist if necessary
- **Psychologist** – to find a psychologist, contact your local community health centre or the Australian Psychological Society for a referral to a private psychologist Tel. 1800 333 497
- beyondblue info line – for information and referral only Tel. 1300 224 636
- Suicide Helpline Victoria – for 24-hour counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral Tel. 1300 651 251
- Mensline Australia– 24-hour, anonymous support for men with family and relationship problems especially around family breakdown or separation Tel. 1300 789 978
- **Lifeline** – 24-hour counselling, information and referral Tel. 13 11 14
- **Lifeline's Just Ask** – Rural Mental Health Information Service Tel. 1300 13 11 14

Things to remember

- Depression in men is a common illness, which can be treated.
- Depression is an illness, not a weakness; so don't feel ashamed to seek help.
- Don't put off seeing a health professional. Seek help early.
- With the right treatment, most people recover from depression.

Want to know more?

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

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