



Depression is the most common mental health problem for young Australians. About one in every four people aged 12 to 25 will experience depression.



If it's not treated, depression can lead to you underachieving at study or work, losing contact with friends and family, substance misuse, and an increased risk of suicide.



What are normal feelings and what's depression?

We all feel 'down' or sad from time to time - it's part of being human. 'Sadness' is a reaction to something in particular, like a relationship break-up. 'Depression' means that feelings of sadness last longer than normal, affect most parts of your life, and stop you enjoying the things that you used to.

There are a several different types of depression. Major depression usually happens in episodes, when depressed feelings build up slowly over a few weeks. Young people often have mood swings (feeling 'up' sometimes as well as 'down') and may be more irritable and sensitive than usual. This means major depression is sometimes hard to diagnose, being mistaken for normal adolescent moods.

Typical symptoms of depression include:

- Higher body temperature
- Feelings of unhappiness, moodiness and irritability, and sometimes emptiness or numbness
- Losing interest and pleasure in activities that you once enjoyed
- Loss of appetite and weight (but sometimes people 'comfort eat' and put on weight)
- Either trouble sleeping, or over-sleeping and staying in bed most of the day
- Tiredness, lack of energy and motivation
- Feeling worried or tense.
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Feeling bad, worthless or guilty
- Being self-critical and self-blaming
- Having dark and gloomy thoughts, including thoughts of death or suicide.

Dysthymia is a milder type of depression but it is often continuous and can last for months or years. People with dysthymia might still be able to perform their day-to-day tasks, but with less interest, confidence and enjoyment. Dysthymia also interferes with sleep, appetite, energy and concentration.

Depression can also occur as part of bipolar disorder (see www.headspace.org.au).

People with depression might have other mental or physical health problems as well, such as anxiety or excessive use of cigarettes, alcohol or illegal drugs.



Depression

Depression and suicide

Anyone who is depressed may be at risk of suicide, and if they are, they need urgent help. If someone seems to be thinking about suicide, try to arrange some support from close, trusted friends or family, remove things that can be used to commit suicide (like tablets or guns) and try to encourage them to see a health professional.

You can call your local hospital or mental health service for support. They are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Mental health teams can see people who are suicidal at any time of the day, wherever they are.

Getting help for depression

It's important to talk about your problems. Ask for help and speak to someone you trust, whether a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (doctor) is a good place to start when seeking help and information.

Most people are able to recover from depression when they receive professional treatment. Treatments are usually based on psychological ('talking') therapy, adding medications when they are needed. You should expect to feel better within a few weeks of starting treatment, or even earlier.

Healthy eating and exercise can help improve your mood. Try relaxation techniques, writing down your feelings, reducing stress and avoiding alcohol and other drugs, but remember that some days will be better than others. Overcoming depression can take time, especially if it has been around for a while and has become a "way of life".

For more information, and to find out how to get help, visit the headspace website: www.headspace.org.au