

understanding depression

(it's more than sadness)

Many people feel sad after they have gone through stressful or difficult times. This could be a relationship break-up, trouble with friends or family, changing schools or exam times. It's normal to feel down from time to time, and it can actually help you to figure out what's important to you.



The word 'depression' is often used when people are talking about moments when they're feeling sad or down. Depression and feeling depressed is more than 'feeling sad'.

Different people will experience depression in different ways. It usually includes these signs and symptoms – for a period of at least 2 weeks – without improvement.

Signs and symptoms

Changes to your feelings or emotions

Like feeling unhappy, numb, empty, irritable, guilty or like everything is too hard.

Changes to your thoughts

Like having negative thoughts, struggling to concentrate, or having thoughts of self harm or suicide.

Physical changes

Like feeling tired most of the time, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite or unexplained aches or pains.

Behaviour changes

Like withdrawing from family or friends, not getting things done or using more alcohol and other drugs.

There's no simple answer to why depression happens. For some, it can be a combination of challenging life events or issues. These might include things like prolonged stress, traumatic relationships, discrimination, bullying or social isolation.

Other things that have been linked to depression are things like decreased sleep, increased alcohol and other drug use, lack of exercise and poor diet. For others, it might be connected to a family history, or other individual coping style factors. But sometimes there's no clear reason and that's OK, too.

It's important to deal with depression early before it starts having a bigger impact on your life.

What can I do?

People experiencing depression can and do get better.

A part of depression means it can feel hard to find the energy or motivation to make some changes. Sometimes it might feel like nothing will help. That's why recovery is often made easier when someone has support from people around them, including family, friends, school and community groups.

It can help to start with one thing you know you can do, then slowly add things in step by step. This can help you feel like you're making progress.

1 Take care of yourself

Looking after our minds and bodies can help us with our general mental health and wellbeing. You can:

- eat well to improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing
- sleep well to help your brain and body rest
- get moving to help you sleep better, manage stress and boost your mood
- avoid, or at least limit your use of, alcohol and other drugs.

2 Notice your thinking patterns

Being aware of our thoughts and feelings is an important step toward improving how we feel. Taking notes on this can help you to figure out which thoughts make you feel better or worse. Keeping a journal can help you to understand this more.

3 Express your thoughts and feelings

It's a good idea to talk to someone you trust about your thoughts and feelings. Talking to others can help you feel understood and may help you see things from a different point of view. You might:

- talk to your family or friends, a teacher or coach, your mob or Elders
- get support from online communities or resources
- connect with others and be part of a group, like a sporting club or religious group, to manage feelings of loneliness.

4 Get into life

Sometimes it can be difficult to think of enjoyable things when you're feeling low. It might take some extra effort, but try to do something that you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it. This can be very helpful in lifting your mood. Try to notice any changes in how you feel before and after these activities.

Learning new skills can also help boost your confidence and give you a feeling of achievement.

5 Try some relaxation strategies

Relaxation is a way to deal with stress and can help ease heavy emotions. There are lots of websites and apps that can help you with this – just google 'meditation apps'.

The link between depression, suicide and self harm

Some young people who experience depression also self harm or experience thoughts of suicide. Self harm and thoughts about suicide are often ways of trying to cope with difficult emotions.

If you have thoughts of suicide or self harm it's really important to talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend or teacher.

How do I get help?

For some people, using the tips on this fact sheet will be enough to help manage symptoms of depression, but if you experience these symptoms most of the time, for longer than two weeks – it's time to reach out for support.

An important part of professional support is talking (psychological) therapy. This can help you learn more about how your depression works and how to change how you feel.

You have lots of options for getting support with depression:

- mental health professionals at headspace centres and eheadspace (online and phone support) can help
- if you're at school or uni, you may be able to access a counselling or student wellbeing service
- your general practitioner (GP) might also suggest antidepressant medications. The GP or service you reach out to will help to recommend an approach that works for you.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)



If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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