



the facts:  
mental health challenges



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National Youth Mental Health Foundation

# understanding depression

**The word depression is often used when people are talking about times when they're feeling sad or down.**

However, depression and feeling depressed is more than feeling sad. Depression is when feelings of sadness, emptiness and irritability last longer than two weeks, affect most parts of a person's daily life, and get in the way of them doing things that they normally enjoy.

There is no simple reason why depression happens. For some, a mix of events or challenges can end up

affecting how they feel, think and act. Things like constant stress, unhealthy relationships, discrimination, bullying or social isolation. For some it can be connected to family history, or individual coping styles, but sometimes there's no clear reason, and that can be frustrating to understand.



The good news is that people experiencing depression can and do get better.



## Signs and symptoms

Depression can be different for everyone, but there are some common signs and symptoms. These can include experiencing some of the following changes for more than two weeks:

### Changes to feelings or emotions

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

### Changes to thoughts

Like having unhelpful thoughts, finding it hard 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, losing interest in previously enjoyed activities, not getting things done or using more alcohol and other drugs.

Many people experience some of these symptoms at different times in their lives. What makes depression different is that the symptoms affect a person's daily life, and they don't tend to go away easily.

Sometimes people with depression experience other mental health challenges too, such as anxiety. Some may also use alcohol and other drugs, but these can make people feel much worse in the long term.



## Depression and the link between suicide and self harm

Some young people who experience depression 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, an Elder, teacher or counsellor.

You can also develop a safety plan yourself to help cope with feelings of distress and suicidal thoughts by using the BeyondNow app ([beyondblue.org.au/beyondnow](https://beyondblue.org.au/beyondnow)).

**For immediate help contact triple zero (000) if it is an emergency.**

12%

of young people aged 15-24 reported feeling depressed or are diagnosed with a depressive disorder (Lawrence et al 2015)<sup>2</sup>.



## Getting support

For some people, using these tips will be enough to manage their symptoms of depression. But if the depression has been going on for too long without improvement, it's important to get professional help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can recover.

## So what can I do?

A part of depression means it can feel hard to find the energy or motivation to do these things. Sometimes it might feel like nothing will help. Try starting with one thing you know you can do, then slowly add things in step by step. This can build your confidence and help you feel like you're making progress.



There are lots of things that you can do to improve how you feel and get better at managing tough times.



### Talk about it

It's a good idea to talk to someone that you trust about what's going on for you. Talking to others can help you feel understood and supported.

### 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
- stay active to help boost your energy, manage stress and boost your mood
- limit your use of alcohol and other drugs.

### Get into life

Sometimes it can be difficult to do or think of enjoyable things when you're feeling low. It can take some extra effort but trying to do something that you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it can help lift your mood and energy.

### Learn skills for tough times

Learning new ways to manage the thoughts, feelings and physical sensations of depression can be helpful. Speaking to a mental health clinician is one way to explore these and learn new skills.



1. ABS. National Health Survey: first results, 2017–18 Australia. ABS cat. no. 4364.0.55.001. Canberra; 2018.

2. Lawrence D et al. The mental health of children and adolescents: Report on the Second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing [Internet]. 2015. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/the-mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents>



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE 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://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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