

Depression

Depression is a word sometimes used to express feelings of sadness, disappointment, or simply being upset. Clinical depression however, is more than just a low mood; it can have serious effects on physical and mental health and is different to the 'healthy' and 'functional' emotions such as grief and loss. Depression can last for weeks, months or years and can be likely to recur if not treated. It is also very common; on average, one in five people will experience depression in their lives (one in four females and one in six males).

Causes

There is no single cause for depression but rather a combination of biological, psychological and social risk factors.

Biological Risk Factors:

- Genetic vulnerability (family history of depression)
- Brain and chemical changes

Psychological Risk Factors:

- Personality (e.g. perfectionistic, self-critical, anxious, worrying)
- Long-standing traits or thought patterns (e.g. attend to stimuli /events that reinforce mood and negative thoughts)
- Lack of resources (coping skills, problem-solving strategies)

Social Risk Factors:

- Both past and present risk which may have short or long-standing influence:
 - *Life Stress*: difficulty at work, loss of job, difficulty in school, financial stress, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, grief, physical illness, bullying
 - *Early environment*: dysfunctional parental styles, low socio-economic status, trauma
- Lack of social support or isolation
- Culture: loss of cultural identity, gender roles

What do I look out for?

Symptoms can include:

- Low mood which has persisted for two weeks or longer
- Loss of interest in pleasurable activities and daily routine
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Increase / decrease in appetite
- Fatigue, loss of energy, loss of motivation
- Social withdrawal
- Anxiety
- Suicidal thoughts, a plan for suicide or an attempt at suicide
- Worry and negative thinking
- Low confidence or self-esteem
- Feelings of hopelessness and / or helplessness
- Impaired concentration or decision-making

Treatments

- Psychological – evidence-based treatment which focuses on individual needs
- Pharmacological medications
- Research suggests that there are different *subtypes of depression*. Therefore, clients diagnosed with a subtype that is primarily biological will respond best to pharmacological medications and only minimally to psychological interventions. For further reading, visit www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

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Things that help

- Don't try to get better on your own. Enlist support from friends, family, colleagues and / or a health professional, such as your GP or a psychologist.
- Inform yourself about depression through books, websites, or talk with a health professional
- Download a *daily mood chart* from the Black Dog website and keep a record of: moods on a day to day basis (rated 1 - 10, where 1 = worst / 10 = best); activities you engaged in; hours of sleep, etc. to monitor your progress.
- Try a variety of types of activities (pleasant, social, exercise, relaxation) to help you feel better and give a sense of *moving forward* and *achieving*. Activity can help you to feel less tired, think more clearly and give a different perspective on a particular problem.
- Analyse your thinking – complete a *thought diary* to record the situation / triggering event, as well as your thoughts, beliefs, expectations, perception, attitude – ask yourself, “*what was I thinking of when the event occurred?*” Write down the consequences, including negative emotions and actions / behaviours. Cognitive strategies may include thought-stopping, distraction, cognitive diffusion, Socratic questioning and keeping a *worry diary*.
- Develop a daily routine that takes into account nutrition and good sleep habits.
- Learn new coping skills, i.e. structured problem-solving, social skills training, mindfulness.

How can friends or family help?

- If you think a friend or family member has depression, try talking to them about it in a supportive manner, suggest they consult their GP or other health professional, or offer to take them to see one.
- Encourage and support participation in social activities.
- Be *patient* and *understanding* – don't apply pressure by telling the person to “*snap out of it*” or telling them to “*get out more*”.
- Don't avoid or ignore the person.
- Consider seeking help from a counsellor or psychologist to assist you in managing and supporting both yourself and the person with depression.

Websites you can visit

- www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- www.beyondblue.org.au
- www.cci.health.wa.gov.au
- Moodgym.anu.edu.au