

Depression

How do I know I'm depressed?

People experience depression in many different ways. Someone might feel low for a few days if they are worried about something specific that's going on in their life. Someone else might feel extremely sad for many months, barely capable of doing anything, perhaps viewing their whole life as meaningless and pointless. There is a huge range in the severity of depression. It is perfectly normal to feel sad from time to time. It is understandable to feel low if something very stressful has just occurred, such as losing a job or a relationship.

But there is a significant difference between feeling low for a few days and suffering from depression. Depressed mood is a problem when the feelings of sadness are overwhelming or if you find it hard to enjoy things you used to find pleasant. It is particularly a problem if these feelings interfere with your daily activities.

Common signs and symptoms of major depression include:

- Feeling sad most of the day, nearly every day, over a period of at least a couple of weeks
- Difficulty engaging in usual activities and difficulty enjoying activities
- Withdrawing from social activities
- Significant loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulties with concentration and memory, and difficulty making decisions
- Feeling slowed down, tired, lacking energy or not very motivated to do things
- Irritability
- Feeling very guilty about things
- Excessive worry or rumination
- Feeling hopeless about the future
- Feeling very low about oneself and one's abilities. Feelings of worthlessness
- Reduced interest in sex
- Feeling suicidal, perhaps even thinking about how to harm one self.

Not everyone with Major Depression experiences all of these symptoms. Most people suffering from depression will notice a few of these signs. Occasionally people experience symptoms of depression and don't realise that they are due to depression (eg. poor sleep, reduced appetite, difficulties with concentration).

What can I do if I'm feeling depressed?

The first thing you need to do is to tell yourself that because you are human it is not unusual to feel depressed from time to time. Everyone feels down occasionally. What's more, about one in four people will suffer from depression at some time in their life (which amounts to about five million people in Australia alone).

Whilst some people seem to work through their depression alone or with the help of friends and family, others need the help of a professional. If you are feeling overwhelmed by your mood and if it is adversely affecting areas of your life then you need to speak with a clinical psychologist. You definitely need to **tell someone if you are feeling suicidal**, preferably a clinical psychologist or alternatively, your GP.

What can a clinical psychologist do about my depression?

A clinical psychologist will first listen to your concerns. He or she will ask some questions about your depression and about some of the things that have happened in your life, especially things that have happened recently which might have contributed to your depression. During the first session the clinical psychologist will discuss with you what your best options for treatment are, and what interventions might be necessary.

If both of you agree on treatment, the clinical psychologist will work with you closely and help you to develop skills in managing your mood. Most clinical psychologists practice **cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)** which is proven to be a highly effective treatment for depression. In essence, this approach involves helping people to (1) develop ways to change unhelpful behaviour patterns (such as developing strategies for gradually increasing fulfilling activity and decreasing withdrawal and avoidance), (2) modify unhelpful and negative thinking patterns, and (3) work through current life problems. It is a relatively short term treatment approach which usually occurs over a few weeks. The length of time and the specific format of treatment will depend on your individual concerns, but the most important thing to note is that CBT has been proven to be effective.

Who else should I see about my depression?

In many cases, seeing your clinical psychologist alone is sufficient. However, it might also be worth seeing your general practitioner (family doctor) about your depression. Your GP might be able to talk through some of your problems with you. He or she might also prescribe antidepressant medication, although this is not always necessary.

If you have any friends or family who are prepared to listen, talk with them about your difficulties. It is important to make the most of your support network in times of need.

If you would like any more information on depression and cognitive behaviour therapy, please feel free to contact us 02 9231 2522 or info@makingchanges.com.au.

Other brochures that are available include: Anxiety, Pain, Insomnia, Relationship Difficulties