



Understanding depression

What is 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. We don't know exactly what causes depression but we do know there are a number of things linked to its development. Depression usually develops because of a combination of life events, personal factors and changes in the brain. It doesn't usually develop because of just one issue or event.

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.

Signs & 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.



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So what can you 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.



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.

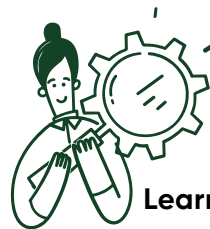


Take care of yourself

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.*

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 worker is one way to explore these and learn new skills.

Have a look at our Tips for Tough Times tip sheet. It has some really great tips and strategies for managing tough times.

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 more than 2 weeks without improvement, it's important to get professional help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can recover.

You can get in contact with **Rural Aid's Mental Health & Wellbeing** team by calling **1300 327 624** or emailing mhwb@ruralaid.org.au

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately or call **000** or speak to someone at **Lifeline (13 11 14)**.