



Depression

What is Depression

Depression is an illness. People with depression generally feel sad, down or miserable most of the time and find it hard to function from day to day.

This fact sheet deals specifically with Clinical Depression. Clinical Depression is different from the normal low feelings and thoughts we experience every now and again, or when going through tough times (sadness).

Clinical Depression is common

- About 800,000 Australians suffer depression each year.
- On average, 1 in 4 females and 1 in 6 males will suffer from depression at some point in their lives.
- Up to 40% of young people experience depressive symptoms, which are especially common among young women 18-24 years.

Clinical Depression is serious

Some factors have been linked with depression, including:

- Family conflict;
- Drugs and alcohol;
- Biological factors;
- Isolation;
- Loneliness;
- Having a serious medical illness.

BUT it is different for everybody - there is no single reason!

How do you know if a person has Clinical Depression

A person may be depressed if *for more than two weeks* they have:

- felt sad, down and miserable;
- Lost interest in things that they would normally enjoy; and
- experienced three or more symptoms across the

following areas:

Thoughts

- Worthlessness or guilt;
- Suicidal ideas and/or thoughts of death;
- Bleak or pessimistic view of the future.

Physical

- Appetite and weight changes;
- Sleep changes, such as insomnia;
- Fatigue or loss of energy.

If you or someone you know needs help - talk to your GP about getting the RIGHT help.

Behaviours

- Moving and thinking slowly or faster;
- Unable to concentrate, memory problems;
- Difficulty making decisions;
- Restlessness or irritability.

These symptoms can be difficult and challenging - both for the sufferers and for people around them. Family, friends and colleagues can help by learning about the illness so as to better understand the mood and behaviour.

If you or someone you know needs help - talk to your GP about getting the RIGHT help.

Causes

There are generally a number of interrelated factors (genetic, environmental and psychological) associated with depression.

• Heredity

Like heart disease or high blood pressure, a vulnerability to depression can run in families.

However, it can also occur when there is no family history of the illness.

- **Biochemistry**
Depression is believed to be due to a reduction of chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain. Antidepressant medications are designed to rectify this imbalance
- **Stress**
Depression can occur following a death, relationship breakdown, job loss or a major life event such as changing schools, giving birth, menopause or retirement. When the reaction exceeds normal feelings of sadness and continues unabated, it may be clinical depression.
- **Personality traits**
Depression is more common among people who have low self esteem, are pessimistic, are readily overwhelmed by stress or have difficulties adapting to changed circumstances.
- **Physical illness**
Depression can occur along with chronic medical illnesses such as Parkinson's disease, heart attack, stroke, cancer and hormonal disorders. The depression can adversely affect recovery.
- **Other mental illnesses**
Depression is also linked to a range of other psychiatric conditions including dementia, anxiety disorders, eating disorders and substance abuse disorders.

Treatment

Clinical Depression is treatable. This means that steps can be taken to help improve symptoms and possibly prevent it from happening again. The earlier treatment begins, the better the prognosis.

Having depression is a bit like being stuck in deep water and not knowing how to swim. You cannot tread water forever - you need to get help and there are treatments out there.

Treatments that have been proven to work are:

- **Antidepressant Medications** to relieve the physical symptoms of the illness

- **Psychological Therapies** (eg Cognitive Therapy or Interpersonal Therapy) to correct the negative ways we think and relationship based issues.

Often the most effective treatments are a combination of both antidepressants and psychological therapies.

Ways to help

Clinical depression is an illness not a flaw. People with depression don't get better on their own.

You can help a friend or family member with depression by:

- Suggesting that they go to a doctor/health professional;
- Assisting them to make the appointment;
- Going with them to see a doctor/health professional;
- Following them up and making sure that they got professional help;
- Encouraging or helping them to get involved in social activities.

Caregivers can help by being generally supportive and avoiding blame or judgement. Some family members find it helpful to get counselling or attend a support group for caregivers.

Research Programs

Visit our website or request our latest Annual Report to find about research programs in the Rebecca L Cooper Laboratories targeting depression.

Support/Information Services

For more information:

- Beyondblue
50 Burwood Road, Hawthorn East 3122
Tel: 1300 22 4636
www.beyondblue.org.au
- DepressionNet
www.depressionnet.com.au
- Moodgym
www.moodgym.anu.edu.au