

Depression

There is a way through it



Information for you, and for family,
whānau, friends and support networks



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Introduction

This booklet is for people who want to know what to do about depression.

Depression can be serious and will affect about one in six New Zealanders at some time in their lives. It is most common in 16–24 year olds, but it can happen at any age.

If you think that you or someone you know has depression, take it seriously and seek help.

This brochure will give you information and options for help. The information applies to adults rather than children.

What is depression?

Depression is much more than just a low mood.

We all feel sad from time to time, but for some people the feeling does not go away. People who feel low most of the time may have an illness called depression.

There are a range of treatments that work, including self-help strategies.

What are the possible signs of depression?

The key signs of depression are:

- feeling down, depressed or hopeless, or
- having little interest or pleasure in doing things on most days over the past month.

Other possible signs include:

- irritability
- loss of energy
- tiredness
- sleep problems
- changes in appetite
- low self-esteem
- problems with concentration
- reduced sex drive
- feelings of emptiness or loneliness.

Often people with depression also experience constant worry (anxiety). This can cause physical symptoms like pain, a pounding heart or stomach cramps. In some people these physical symptoms are their main concern. Some people may feel so bad that they wish they were dead.

Depression can make the smallest task seem like climbing a mountain – however, there is a way through it.

What causes depression?

Different things seem to trigger depression in different people. Sometimes it happens for no clear reason.

Some things that increase the risk of depression are:

- a past experience of depression
- a family history of depression
- loss or stress, including unemployment, loneliness, lifestyle changes or relationship problems
- financial worries or hardship*
- feeling at odds with your environment (eg, your work, home or other surroundings)
- psychological or physical trauma in the past
- physical illness or long-term health problems
- some medicines, check this with your doctor.

Too much alcohol, recreational or party drugs can make depression worse.

Some women are more likely to experience depression after childbirth, especially if they have any of the risk factors listed above.

Good experiences such as a close bond with a partner, friend, family or whānau may help to prevent depression.

* Added in 2009

What can I do if I think I have depression?

If you think you may be depressed, ask for help – the sooner the better.

You do not need to deal with this on your own.

You could:

- tell someone you trust how you are feeling. This could be someone in your family or whānau, your partner, a friend or a spiritual leader
- talk to your doctor or other health care professional and take part as much as you can in choosing your treatment
- if you have thoughts of harming yourself – talk to someone you trust who can stay with you until you feel safer or call a crisis phone line (see back cover)
- contact a support group. See the 'Personal Help Services' section in the front pages of your phone book or ask your local Citizen's Advice Bureau
- learn about depression to help you make sense of how you feel (see back cover).

If you tell someone and they don't understand, tell someone else.

It may also be helpful to build up your general health with daily physical activity and a healthy diet. Some ways to help yourself (self-help techniques) are described on the next pages. It can be very hard to make changes when you are depressed so ask friends and family to support you.

Don't think you have to 'harden up' or turn to alcohol, recreational or party drugs – these things don't help.

How is depression treated?

There are a range of treatments that can help.

These include:

- self-help techniques
- psychological therapies (also known as talking therapies)
- antidepressant drugs.

Whatever you choose to do, remember that health professionals are skilled in treating depression and can support and help you through it. The main thing is to find a treatment that helps and for you to give it enough time to work properly. So keep in touch with your health practitioner, especially if the treatment you are using does not seem to be helping.

Self-help techniques

Planning your day

When you are feeling depressed or low, it can be very hard to get going, but the more you can do, the better you are likely to feel.

Tips to plan your day:

- **make a chart so you can fill in what you plan to do each day (if you need to, ask someone to help you)**
- **write in the everyday things, like mealtimes**
- **fill in the gaps with other things, like doing your shopping or gardening**
- **plan to do at least one thing that you enjoy each day**
- **plan to do some physical activity each day**
- **if you run late, skip to the next thing on your plan**
- **plan to do things with other people if you don't feel like doing anything at all**
- **reward yourself for what you have done.**

Adapted from: Beyond Blue Fact Sheet 8: Keeping Active.
www.beyondblue.org.au

Dealing with stress

- When things seem really hard, take them one step at a time.
- Enjoy the little things, make time for yourself.
- Understand when you need to stop – don't be hard on yourself.

Physical activity

- To help you feel better, try to increase your physical activity and get some fresh air and sunlight every day.
- A regular routine of brisk exercise is ideal, but any physical activity is better than none.
- If you need support to stay active, ask your health practitioner for written advice on physical activity – this is called a 'Green Prescription'.

Dealing with sleep problems

- Have some physical activity every day.
- Do relaxing things before bedtime.
- Try to go to bed and get up at about the same time each day.
- Avoid taking naps in the daytime.
- Avoid or cut down on coffee, cola, energy drinks, tobacco and alcohol, especially in the evening.
- If you can't sleep, get up and go into another room and watch TV or read until you feel sleepy again. Don't stay in bed worrying that you can't sleep.

Dealing with overuse of alcohol or other recreational drugs

- Too much alcohol, recreational or party drugs can make depression worse.
- Ask your friends, family and/or doctor to help you plan how to cut down or give up.
- Your doctor can recommend an alcohol and drug counselling service to help you.

Complementary and alternative medicine

There are various complementary and alternative medicines that people use for depression. Some examples are massage, acupuncture and food supplements.

St John's wort is a herbal therapy that some people use. If you plan to take St John's wort, tell your health practitioner. It can cause serious interactions with a wide range of drugs, including oral contraceptives, anticoagulants and anticonvulsants.

Psychological and drug therapies

For mild depression, self-help and psychological therapies are helpful. Psychological therapies include counselling and other specific therapies that target depression. Antidepressant drug therapies also help in some cases.

For moderate depression, psychological therapies and antidepressant drugs both work equally well.

For severe depression, antidepressant drugs, either alone or with a psychological therapy, are more likely to be recommended.

Examples of psychological therapies that target depression are problem-solving therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT). These therapies should be given only by therapists who are trained and skilled in their use. Ask your health practitioner for more information.

If you are prescribed an antidepressant drug, your doctor will explain:

- what symptoms the drug should help with
- how long it will take to work
- how long you will need to take it
- possible side effects.

Ask for this information in writing.

Most treatments take time to start working. Ask your health practitioner what to expect.

How can I help someone else with depression?

It can be very hard to see a loved one struggle with depression. You may feel hurt, isolated, ashamed and stressed out.

Family, whānau, partners and close friends of people with depression have found the following strategies helpful.

- Learn about depression, how it is treated and what you can do to help recovery.
- See yourself as part of the support team.
- Try not to see the person as being difficult. Understand the symptoms for what they are.
- Help the person to recognise stress and find ways of coping. This may include helping to solve problems that worry them.
- Encourage the person to be more active, but without pushing or criticising them, as this may make things worse.
- Help and encourage them to lead a healthy life, to exercise and have fun.
- Spend time with them.
- Don't be embarrassed to praise them.
- Encourage them to keep up with their treatment and to avoid excess alcohol and drug use.
- Take any thoughts of suicide seriously – it's okay to talk about it. Don't leave someone alone if they feel unsafe. Contact a health care provider or a crisis phone line (see back cover).

Adapted from: Mental Health Foundation booklet: Depression.
Available at www.mentalhealth.org.nz

If you are caring for someone with severe depression it is important to find ways of getting time-out for yourself and to feel okay about this. Caring for a family or whānau member with depression can be very hard and it is important to keep yourself well.

Think about contacting a support network for carers (eg, Carers New Zealand www.carers.co.nz).

“ *Hope is so important.
Hang on to **hope**.
Grab hold of it. There **is** a way
through it.* ”

Further information

Support and advice

For support and advice about services in your area, phone the depression helpline on **0800 111 757**.

For young people, get online support from the Lowdown Team at www.thelowdown.co.nz or **text them on 5626 (free)**.

General information about depression

www.depression.org.nz

www.thelowdown.co.nz

Additional resources can be found at:
www.nzgg.org.nz – click on ‘Consumer Resources’ then ‘Mental Health’

Information about suicidal thoughts

www.nzgg.org.nz – click on ‘Consumer Resources’ then ‘Mental Health’

www.spinz.org.nz

Crisis phone services

www.youthline.co.nz – Freephone 0800 37 66 33

www.lifeline.org.nz – Freephone 0800 543 354

Mental Health Services Crisis Response Team

Your local team is listed under ‘Hospitals and other Health Service Providers’ in the green section of your local phone book.

Copies are available free from:

- Freephone 0800 111 757
- Wickliffe 04 496 2277. Order No. HP: 4309
- www.nzgg.org.nz or info@nzgg.org.nz