

# Depression

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## What is Depression?

**Depression** is the experience of sad, unhappy, low feelings that won't go away. People often call 'normal sadness' **depression**. We are all sad at times. But if sadness passes, it is not really depression.

In true depression, sad feelings linger and interfere with normal life. Severe lingering sadness may be referred to as **Clinical Depression**. If we are 'clinically depressed,' things that would normally cheer us up don't have a positive effect. We remain feeling sad, unaffected by the cheerful event.

Depression could occur due to a chemical imbalance or to a succession of negative events, from which the person has not had time to recover. Either way, the mental health profession regards depression as a diagnosable mental illness. From a philosophical (counsellor) perspective, this is tricky, as many of the situations that cause or contribute to depression are 'problems of life' rather than 'being sick.' Regardless of cause, a therapist can assist the sufferer to recover.

## Symptoms of Depression

Symptoms include: sad feelings, irritability, loss of interest in normal or pleasurable activities, feeling empty or numb, changes in sleep patterns, eating habits or weight, poor motivation, concentration and self-esteem, tiredness, lethargy and morbid thoughts of death or suicide.

Depression can interfere with normal life. The lack of motivation makes it hard for the sufferer to carry out work enthusiastically, respond well to others, or feel positive about anything. Even getting up in a morning or enjoying a meal can be extremely difficult, and almost impossible at times. The lack of enjoyment and positive feelings compound the situation, making it progressively worse.

## Causes of Depression

Causes include distressing life events from which the person has not fully recovered. They may have lacked skill or resources, or were already in a 'low place.' It was just too much to handle at the time. Others triggers include family dramas, relationship break ups, unresolved conflicts, being abused or bullied, or ongoing difficulties that the person cannot find a way to resolve or bring to an end.

Inadequate processing of traumatic events when they occurred can make events linger around in the person's memory, leading to depression. Personality factors include over-sensitivity (especially to criticism), excessive self-criticism, perfectionism and the inclination to worry about things.

The use of drugs and the abuse of alcohol can also cause depression. Seasonal factors can bring on a type of depression, called SAD – Seasonal Affective Disorder. The person habitually feels sad during the winter climate. SAD is thought to be caused by the effect of reduced light exposure during the winter months. Some people are susceptible to SAD, whereas others in the same climate are not.

Whatever the cause of the depression, it is not helpful to 'blame' the person. This does not aid recovery. Care, sensitivity and encouraging the person to think, feel and act positively does. Sufferers benefit from learning Mindfulness practices, as taught in **MiCBT**.

## Managing Depression

You can alleviate the symptoms of depression by examining and modifying your thoughts, feelings and actions. Each one of these affects the other two. By working on any one of them, you will bring improvement. By working on all three, you will feel so much better!

## Thinking

Inaccurate thinking is often a catalyst for depression. Improve your thinking and start to improve your feelings! Examine the types of thoughts you have when feeling depressed. Chances are they are negative. What negative thoughts do you have? Write some of them down. Look at them!

Consider whether these thoughts are realistic. Reflect on them objectively, as if they belonged to someone else, such as your best friend. Do they really represent how things are? Chances are they do not. They are likely to be exaggerated, out of proportion with the reality of things.

Now look at those thoughts from a more positive perspective. Re-write them in a more affirmative, optimistic mode. For example, if you're thinking: 'Life is awful, nothing works out the way I want it to,' it would be more helpful expressed as: 'Things are not ideal right now, but life is constantly changing and there might be better times around the corner.' Or: 'How could I turn this around?'

Avoid ruminating on negative thoughts. You can stop ruminating by actively turning your mind to positive things. Do this purposefully. If you have difficulty stopping negative thoughts, allow yourself a short period per day only to think them, then have something ready to distract you.

Likewise, avoid excessively discussing your negative thoughts with others. Maybe tell them how you feel, get it off your chest, then put it aside. Constantly talking about it will only re-enforce it in your mind – not a very helpful thing to do. Instead, make an effort to think and talk about something nice.

## Feeling

Associated with low, sad feelings, there may be feelings of frustration, boredom, agitation or anxiety. Your ability to stay calm and avoid overreacting may be affected. If others are around you, explain to them how you are feeling. Tell them that if you are over or under reactive, it is not about them.

Explain that you don't want them to take it personally. Let them know that you are trying to manage your depression and would appreciate their understanding and support. This is much better than shutting down and leaving others wondering what they have done to upset you.

Discuss your feelings with a trusted friend or therapist. Don't dwell on negative feelings excessively. Share them, get some empathic support, and then try to relax and feel calm. If your feelings become really low and you want to 'end it all,' do seek help. Speak to someone, friend, neighbour, family, therapist or crisis phone counsellor. Explain how you feel and accept their help. In an emergency, call [Lifeline: 13 11 14](tel:131114), [Suicide and Crisis Support: 1300 659 467](tel:1300659467), or [Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636](tel:1300224636).

Realise that your feelings are not the whole of you. They are just how you are right now. Focusing on positive thoughts and activities will bring a positive change in how you feel. It does not take long.

## Action

Have regular exercise, good food and sleep. Regular habits ground you and help you feel safe. Looking after yourself physically has a big impact on how you feel. List the things you like to do and do at least one or more per day. Complete any unfinished tasks. Enjoy the sense of accomplishment that a completed task brings. Make plans for what you will do next. Set positive goals and little steps towards achieving them. Spend some time each day relaxing and meditating. Don't use the time to think negatively. If you do not know how to meditate correctly, we can help you.

MiCBT (Mindfulness-integrated Cognitive Behaviour Therapy) is exceptional in beating depression. If you would like information about this and help managing Depression, contact us below. Better to take action now, rather than feeling awful, suffering, and wasting precious moments of your life.

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