

# What is Depression?

## *What is depression?*

All people experience sadness. This may last for a few hours or a few days. Often the cause of the sadness is obvious and we may find our own ways to cope and continue living our lives. But sometimes, the feelings of sadness don't go away and may be so overwhelming that they make it hard for people to live their lives.

Depression occurs when we continually feel sad for a number of weeks, accompanied by a group of physical and psychological symptoms. Although the word depression is common in Western countries, it is unfamiliar to many people in different parts of the world.

## *What are the symptoms?*

Symptoms of depression can include:

- Feeling sad, crying easily
- Sleep disturbance
- Change in appetite and weight
- Loss of interest and motivation
- Loss of energy and becoming easily fatigued
- Physical aches and pains, especially headaches or stomach pains
- Loss of sexual interest
- Feeling that life is not worth living
- Feelings of helplessness
- Guilt and anger toward self
- Pessimism regarding future
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Alcohol and drug abuse

## *What are the causes of depression?*

Depression can be triggered by social factors or an event (or events) that occur in a person's life; such as losing someone close to you, single parenthood, poverty, unemployment, unsuitable housing, illness, and isolation.

Depression can also be related to domestic violence, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, prolonged periods of stress, trauma, and sexuality issues.

People from diverse cultural backgrounds face additional potential contributing factors. These can include social and cultural isolation, experience of trauma in the country of origin and during migration, difficulty adjusting to the new culture, racism and prejudice, and lack of English language skills.

Sometimes the causes of depression are biological, due to a chemical imbalance in the brain. It could also be a combination of biological and social factors.

## *Treatment Options*

In Australia, treatment for depression may include medical and non-medical treatment.

### *Medical Treatment*

When prescribed appropriately for major and severe depression, anti-depressant medication can be useful in the treatment of depression. There are several different types

of antidepressants available and quite a few different brand names. This can often get confusing so, if you are prescribed this medication, make sure you find out exactly what you are taking and what the side-effects are.

### *Non-Medical Treatment*

**Counselling** is talking about your problems with someone outside your own circle who is there to listen to you without judging you. Counselling is a process where you can express your thoughts and feelings in a way that helps to clarify difficulties and discover solutions.

**Naturopathy** is a medical discipline that uses herbal medicine, vitamins, minerals, massage and nutrition to treat people within a holistic framework. Naturopathy has little or no side effects.

**Herbal remedies** focus on helping the body heal itself. The natural remedies are made from substances that come from plants. These have little or no side-effects.

**Contact with family and friends** - Having people around that you can trust and confide in is often beneficial. Even when you least feel like it, try to spend time with people you care for and who care for you.

**Acupuncture** is an ancient Oriental healing method which can restore the balance of energy in your body, it helps heal disease and relieve tension. Acupuncture involves inserting fine needles into strategic energy points on the body.

### *Traditional Treatment Options*

Different cultures and religions have different healing rituals that help resolve mental health issues and promote wellbeing. They may include:

- recitation of holy texts (e.g. reading Quran)
- special prayers
- visiting holy sites and shrines
- consulting religious leaders & traditional healers

Cultural and religious treatment options can be used in combination with medical and non-medical treatment options practiced in Australia. There is no reason why you cannot consult a religious figure in addition to a medical professional to assist in the management of depression.

### *References*

*Depression is never really 'black and white'. Some facts about Depression.* The Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre. Multilingual Information Series. [www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/qtmhc/docs/d-english.pdf](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/pahospital/qtmhc/docs/d-english.pdf)

*Facts about Depression... and how to turn it around...* (2004). Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre. [www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication\\_pdfs/8100/OTH-8100-ENG.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication_pdfs/8100/OTH-8100-ENG.pdf)

*Making Sense of Depression.* (2004). NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service. NSW Health Department. [www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication\\_pdfs/5080/BHC-5080-ENG.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhcs/publication_pdfs/5080/BHC-5080-ENG.pdf)



Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre  
251 High Street, Preston 3072  
Ph: 9496-0200 Fax: 9484-7942  
[info@spectrumvic.org.au](mailto:info@spectrumvic.org.au)  
[www.spectrumvic.org.au](http://www.spectrumvic.org.au)