

Depression is common. Among Australians aged 12-25 years, depression is the most common mental health problem.

- (1). Around 1 in 4 young people will have had a depressive disorder by the end of their adolescence
- (2). It's important that you get support if you are feeling depressed.

The consequences of untreated depression can often be quite serious and can include performing poorly at school and/or work, losing friends and family supports, substance abuse and a high risk of suicide.

What are normal feelings and what's depression?

People use the word depression in different ways. We all feel down or sad from time to time. It's just part of being human. But, it's important to know when depression is becoming a problem. It's also important to know the difference between depression and sadness. Sadness is a feeling that is a reaction to something, like a break-up or losing someone. Depression becomes an illness or a problem when the feelings of sadness last for a lot longer than normal and seem to cast a dark cloud over life, stopping someone from enjoying most things and from taking part in activities that used to be enjoyable and easy to do.

Major Depression

Major depression is the depressive illness people are most familiar with. Major depression usually happens in episodes. A depressive episode tends to build up slowly over a couple of weeks or more.

Young people often experience depression in the same way adults do, with the exception that they often have more mood swings or are more irritable and sensitive than usual. This can make major depression difficult to diagnose as some people may just believe the problem to be "teenage problems".

The typical symptoms of major depression in a young person include:

- > Longstanding feelings of unhappiness, moodiness and irritability. Some people also have feelings of emptiness or numbness
- > Losing interest and pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed
- > Loss of appetite and weight (although some young people may turn to comfort foods, overeat and therefore put on weight)
- > Difficulty sleeping, or sometimes staying in bed most of the day
- > Tiredness, lack of energy and motivation or alternatively feeling worried or tense.
- > Difficulty concentrating and/or making decisions
- > Feeling bad, worthless or guilty and generally being self-critical and self-blaming

- > Negative or "down on yourself" thoughts
- > Preoccupation with dark and gloomy themes and thoughts of death or suicide

Dysthymia

The difference between depression and dysthymia is one of intensity. Dysthymia is often described as a milder version of major depression but often goes on for longer, sometimes many months. People with dysthymia can often complete day to day tasks, but may do so with less interest, while feeling down, and with less confidence and enjoyment. Dysthymia also affects a persons sleeping and eating as well as energy levels and concentration.

Compared to major depression, dysthymia has fewer physical symptoms but can have more emotional symptoms such as gloomy and dark thoughts. Dysthymia, like major depression, still requires treatment.

Bipolar disorder

Bipolar disorder (or manic-depression as it used to be called), is when someone experiences periods of depression (as described above) and periods of mania (extreme highs).

Mania can present as being "over the top" in happiness or anger. A person experiencing mania can be very talkative and excited, so much so you may not understand them. They can have lots of energy, not want to sleep and come up with lots of ideas. The person is not usually aware of their

Types of depression

There are three main types of depression:

- > Major depression
- > Dysthymia
- > Bipolar disorder

symptoms.

There are two types of bipolar disorder, Bipolar I and Bipolar II. Bipolar I is when someone has a period of depression for a few days or weeks and then a period of mania or vice versa. Bipolar II is when someone becomes depressed and then quickly changes from that low mood to a "high" and then back again multiple times in a short space of time (day or week).

It is important for someone with bipolar disorder to seek treatment and help from a counsellor or psychologist

Other problems

Sometimes young people with a depressive disorder may have other mental or physical health problems. For instance some people with depression may also suffer from anxiety problems (i.e. excessive worry), or have a drug use problem (cigarettes/alcohol/illegal drugs).

Suicidal thoughts are common amongst young people with depression so those who appear to be at risk of self-harm or suicide need immediate assistance. Serious concerns should lead to getting the support of close, trusted friends or family, removing all available things that can be used to suicide (eg tablets, firearms) and mental health follow up. You can call your local hospital or local mental health service for support. There are 24hr mental health teams that can see people who are suicidal at any time of the day, wherever they are.

Advice and Referral

If you are working with a young person who appears depressed and you are not sure what to do, it is always best to contact someone with experience in this field and discuss the situation with them.

Treatment of depression should be carried out by workers with training and experience in dealing with mental health problems. Referral to a GP, a trained counsellor or specialist mental health worker may be necessary.



Getting help

> It's important to talk about your problems. Seek help and talk to someone you trust such as a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. Your local doctor or GP is usually very experienced in knowing what is and isn't depression so seek help from them. Most people recover from depression after seeking professional help. Counselling has proven effective in the treatment of depression, especially Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT).

> Eating healthily and exercising can not only keep you fit but can also help your mood. Practising relaxation, writing your feelings down, reducing stress and avoiding alcohol and other drugs can also help, but remember some days may be good and other days not as good, overcoming depression can take time.

DISCUSS



Services at Orygen Youth Health - Clinical Program (OYH-CP) www.oyh.org.au

Orygen Youth Health Clinical program is able to assist some young people (15-24) with anxiety disorders who live in Western or Northwestern Metropolitan Melbourne.

To make a referral or get some advice contact the **OYH-CP** Triage worker on 1800 888 320 or via the paging service on 03 9483 4556.

For children and teenagers under 15 years of age living in Western or Northwestern Metropolitan Melbourne contact RCH Mental Health Service on 1800 445 511.

For further information regarding mental health and information in other languages visit:

- > www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- > www.sane.org.au
- > www.healthinsite.gov.au
- > www.ybblue.com.au
- > www.beyondblue.org.au
- > www.reachout.com.au

(1). Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, Canberra, 2007.
(2). Oakley Browne M, Wells J, Scott K, McGee M (2006). Lifetime prevalence and projected lifetime risk of DSM-IV disorders in Te Rau Hinengaro: the New Zealand Mental health Survey (NZMHS). *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*; 40: 865-874.