



- [What is depression?](#)
- [Signs and symptoms](#)
- [What causes depression](#)
- [Evidence-based psychological interventions](#)
- [How a psychologist can help](#)
- [Other professionals who might be involved](#)
- [When to seek professional help](#)
- [More information](#)

What is depression?

Everyone experiences feelings of sadness, disappointment, or 'the blues' from time to time. Depression however refers to a range of mood and other symptoms that are more intense, pervasive and long-lasting, are distressing to the person, and interfere with their day-to-day life and relationships.

Signs and symptoms

The key symptoms of depression include one or both of the following:

Feelings of sadness, emptiness or lowered mood that lasts for most of the day, nearly every day

Loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyable, like going out, seeing friends, or pursuing interests and hobbies.

These symptoms are experienced persistently for at least two weeks, along with several other symptoms over the same period. These vary from person to person, but can include:

Significant changes in appetite and/or weight in the absence of dieting

Difficulty sleeping or excessive sleeping

Sluggishness

Restlessness

Fatigue and loss of energy

Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness or hopelessness, or excessive guilt

Trouble concentrating or making decisions

Decreased interest in sex

Thoughts of suicide or a feeling that life is not worth living.

What causes depression

Find a Psychologist

Location

Find

There is no one cause for depression. In some individuals, stressful life events such as the loss of a job, long-term unemployment, physical health issues, family problems, the death of a loved one, or the loss of a close relationship might trigger depression. For other people, there is no obvious cause.

Some factors that might place a person at a higher risk of developing depression include:

Family history: Having a close relative with depression can increase a person's chances of developing the condition. This doesn't mean that depression is inevitable – other factors increase or decrease a person's risk.

Social factors: Some people who experience neglect or abuse during childhood might be more likely to develop depression as adults.

Personal psychological factors: People who tend to dwell on negative events, worry excessively, or attend more to negative information about themselves, the world or the future are more prone to depression.

Neurochemistry: Changes in the levels or activity of certain chemicals in the brain like serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine play a role in depression, though the specific processes are not fully understood.

Evidence-based psychological interventions

There are many effective psychological treatments for depression. Certain specialised forms of psychological intervention tend to be more effective than general supportive counselling, as they address current issues and symptoms and also aim to reduce the likelihood of having future episodes of depression.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) focuses on unhelpful thoughts about the self, others, and the future which may contribute to depression. The goal of this type of therapy is to identify, examine, and modify these unhelpful thoughts and the behaviours that follow, and increase behaviours that might improve mood and quality of life. This includes ensuring a balance of enjoyable activities throughout each day, and a range of activities that give the individual a sense of achievement, Problem-solving, to help address possible causes of stress and lowered mood, is also an important component.

Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT)

Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) involves addressing problems in the person's relationships and expectations about others that might be contributing to the symptoms of depression. The aims of this type of therapy include helping the individual to find new ways to develop and nurture relationships, resolve conflicts with others, express emotions and communicate more effectively, adapt to life-role changes, and improve social support networks.

Short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP)

Short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP) can help the person to become more aware and reflective of their own feelings, desires, motivations and thoughts. The goals of this therapy are to identify and change unhelpful defences which may be getting in the way of a healthy life, decrease vulnerability to depression, and build resilience.

How a psychologist can help

The psychologist will ask some questions about the individual's history, circumstances, thoughts, feelings and behaviours. They might also use questionnaires to gather more information. Together, the client and psychologist

work towards an understanding of factors that might be contributing to the person's difficulties. A treatment plan is then developed between the client and the psychologist. The psychologist might use CBT, IPT, STPP, or other psychological strategies such as mindfulness and relaxation to help in the client's recovery.

Other professionals who might be involved

A medical review with a GP is often recommended to help rule out whether a medical condition might account for the symptoms of depression. Where medication might be of benefit, a review with a GP or psychiatrist might be suggested.

Exercise and diet can be important in the treatment of depression, so a nutritionist, dietician or exercise physiologist might also be consulted.

When to seek professional help

When low mood persists for over two weeks and is affecting a person's work, school, home life, or relationships, psychological assistance should be considered. To locate an APS psychologist, call 1800 333 497 or visit www.findapsychologist.org.au. A GP can also organise a referral to a registered psychologist through the Better Access to Mental Health Care items.

More information

Australian Psychological Society

Australia's largest professional association for psychologists
www.psychology.org.au

beyondblue

Provides information on anxiety, depression, and related disorders
www.beyondblue.org.au

Black Dog Institute

An organisation specialising in mood disorder research and education
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au

headspace

Australia's National Youth Mental Health Foundation, providing assistance for individuals aged 12-25 years
www.headspace.org.au

Lifeline

A 24-hour counselling, suicide prevention and mental health support service
Telephone: 13 11 14
www.lifeline.org.au