ADULT WELLBEING

Depression: When to Seek Help

Depression can affect mood, thinking, energy, relationships and everyday life. It does not always look like obvious sadness, and it is not a personal failing.

You do not need to diagnose yourself before asking for help. If you are struggling, a GP or mental health professional can help you understand what is happening and discuss support.

Signs of depression

Possible signs include:

- Feeling persistently low, empty, hopeless or unusually irritable.
- Losing interest or enjoyment in things that usually matter to you.
- Withdrawing from people or everyday activities.
- Changes in sleep or appetite.
- Low energy, reduced motivation or feeling slowed down.
- Difficulty concentrating, deciding or managing tasks.
- Strong feelings of guilt, worthlessness or self-criticism.
- Thoughts of self-harm, suicide or not wanting to be alive.

A list cannot confirm depression. Grief, sleep difficulties, medication effects, physical illness and other mental health conditions can produce overlapping experiences.

When to ask for help

Seek professional advice if changes last around two weeks, affect daily functioning or cause concern. Seek help sooner if symptoms are severe or your safety is at risk.

A GP can review your physical health and medicines as well as your mood. Tell them about any periods of unusually high or irritable mood, much less need for sleep, or unusually increased activity, as these can affect assessment and treatment choices.

Why depression happens

Depression rarely has one simple cause. Physical health, family history, past experiences, relationships, social circumstances and current pressures may all contribute.

Sometimes there is a clear trigger, such as loss, illness or prolonged stress. Sometimes there is not. Understanding the context helps guide care; it is not about finding someone to blame.

How psychological treatment can help

Treatment is chosen with you, taking account of your preferences, symptoms, needs and circumstances.

Evidence-based options include:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT): exploring links between thoughts, actions and feelings, and practising more helpful responses.
- Behavioural activation: taking manageable steps towards meaningful activities and connection, even when motivation is low.
- Interpersonal therapy: working with relationship difficulties, grief or life changes that affect mood.
- Problem-solving therapy: finding practical approaches to difficulties that feel overwhelming.

A psychologist may also help you recognise warning signs, plan for setbacks and build support around recovery. Progress varies, and the plan can be reviewed if it is not helping.

What about medication?

Medication can be helpful for some people, sometimes alongside psychological therapy. Suitability depends on the individual and should be discussed with a medical practitioner.

Psychologists do not prescribe medication. With your consent, they can work with your GP or psychiatrist as part of your care. Do not start, stop or change prescribed medicines without medical advice.

Small steps while you seek support

Try to keep regular meals and a manageable sleep routine. Choose achievable movement, contact with someone you trust, or a small activity that matters to you.

Ask for practical help and reduce unnecessary demands where possible. Alcohol and other substances can make mood and sleep more difficult.

These steps can support recovery, but depression is not solved by willpower or a perfect routine. They do not replace treatment when it is needed.

If you are concerned about your safety

If you may act on thoughts of suicide, cannot keep yourself safe, or have taken an overdose or sustained a serious injury, call 000 or go to the nearest emergency department.

If possible, stay with someone you trust while arranging help. Seek prompt professional support for thoughts of self-harm or suicide, even when there is no immediate danger.

The Psychology Hub is not an emergency or crisis service. Do not wait for a routine appointment or online enquiry response when urgent help is needed.

Support in North Lakes and online across Australia

The Psychology Hub offers psychological support at our North Lakes clinic in Brisbane and online across Australia, subject to suitability and clinician availability.

Private clients can contact us directly. For information about referrals, current fees and possible rebates, speak with our team and your GP.

Call 1300 366 614 or visit thepsychologyhub.com.au/contact/.

References and further reading

Healthdirect: Depression

Australian Psychological Society: Depression treatment

National Institute of Mental Health: Depression

NICE: Depression in adults - treatment and management

General information only. This resource does not replace an individual assessment or advice from a qualified health professional.

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