

What is Depression?

Clinical depression is an illness, a medical condition. It significantly affects the way someone feels, causing a persistent lowering of mood. Depression is often accompanied by a range of other physical and psychological symptoms that can interfere with the way a person is able to function in their everyday life. The symptoms of depression generally react positively to treatment.

What are the symptoms?

Depression has a variety of symptoms and will affect everyone in different ways. Symptoms include: feeling extremely sad or tearful; disturbances to normal sleep patterns; loss of interest and motivation; feeling worthless or guilty; loss of pleasure in activities; anxiety; changes in appetite or weight; loss of sexual interest; physical aches and pains; impaired thinking or concentration.

What causes Depression?

There are a number of possible causes of depression.

- ④ Depression can be a reaction to a distressing situation like loss or stress (reactive depression). Some women experience depression following the birth of a child (post-natal depression).
- ④ Depression can be part of an illness like bipolar disorder in which the person experiences extreme moods without any reason – very high and very-excited or very low and depressed.
- ④ Depression can be unrelated to any outside cause, but associated with a chemical imbalance in the brain (endogenous depression). Sometimes the person may be affected so much that they experience the symptoms of psychosis and are unable to distinguish what is real.

Children and teenagers can also become depressed. This can show itself in different ways to depression in adults, and they are best helped by a doctor who is a specialist in this area.

How many people develop Depression?

Every year, around 6% of all adult Australians are affected by a depressive illness.

How is depression treated?

Treatment can do much to reduce and even eliminate the symptoms of depression. Treatment may include a combination of medication, individual therapy and community support. Sometimes electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) can be helpful too.

- ④ *Medication*
Certain medications assist the brain to restore its usual chemical balance and help control the symptoms of depression.
- ④ *Individual therapy*
A doctor, psychologist or other health professional talks with the person about their symptoms, and discusses alternative ways of thinking about and coping with them.
- ④ *Community support programs*
This support may include information; accommodation; help with finding suitable work, training and education; psychosocial rehabilitation and mutual support groups. Understanding and acceptance by the community is also very important.

How do I find out more?

It is important to ask your doctor about any concerns you have.

SANE Australia also produces a range of easy-to-read publications and multimedia resources on mental illness.

For more information about this topic see:

- ④ *SANE Guide to Depression*
Helps people diagnosed with depression and their family and friends by explaining what it means to have depression, the treatments available and what a person can do to help themselves.
- ④ *Depression DVD Kit*
(Includes a 43 minute DVD and *SANE Guide to Depression*)
People who've experienced depression and their carers talk about the things which have helped them cope better. See above for details on the SANE Guide included.
- ④ *SANE Guide to Staying Alive*
Provides practical step-by-step hints and advice for consumers, carers and health professionals on dealing with suicidal thoughts and behaviour.

To order visit the SANE Bookshop at www.sane.org or call 1800 18 SANE (7263).