

DEPRESSION

Your management options

Depression is a common problem, so if you are depressed you are not alone. More than 1 in 10 Australians will experience an episode of depression in their lifetime.

What is depression?

Depression can be sadness that doesn't go away, a loss of interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy, or a range of other changes in the way you feel, think or act that lasts more than 2 weeks.

Common depression symptoms

- ▶ Low mood/loss of interest in things you used to enjoy
- ▶ Change in your weight or appetite
- ▶ Change in sleep, either sleeping more or not enough
- ▶ Feeling restless or slowed down
- ▶ Fatigue or loss of energy
- ▶ Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- ▶ Problems concentrating or making decisions
- ▶ Thoughts of death or suicide

Recover faster with treatment

There are effective treatments for depression, but there is no single treatment that is right for everybody. It's important to find a treatment that works for you, and this may take some trial and error.

The two main treatments are psychological therapies (eg, cognitive behavioural therapy and interpersonal therapy) and antidepressant medicines.

The decision to take an antidepressant, undertake psychological treatment, combine both approaches or use other management strategies, is very individual. Talk to your health professional about what you think will work best for you.

Psychological treatments

There are many types of psychological treatments and these help change the way you think about and react to situations and relationships. The treatment may involve face-to-face counselling or be accessed through the phone or internet.

Antidepressants

Antidepressants help reduce symptoms of depression by changing the levels of certain neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) that influence your mood.

What can you do?

There are many ways you can help yourself to recover from depression and get your life back on track.

Be realistic in planning your lifestyle changes – start small.

- ▶ Find a type of exercise you enjoy, as you will be more likely to do it regularly. A walk around the block once or twice a week may be enough to get started with an exercise program. Make it something you know you can do.
- ▶ Schedule time in your week for activities you enjoy. It is especially helpful to reconnect with people and get support from others. Get together with friends each week or continue with a hobby you used to enjoy.
- ▶ Follow a healthy eating plan as it is important for maintaining good general health. Eat regular meals and try to eat more wholegrain cereals, fruit, vegetables, beans, lentils, nuts and seeds.

About antidepressant medicines

Individual antidepressants can be grouped into different classes, according to how they work chemically in the body. The different groups of antidepressants are about as effective as each other overall, but some people will respond to one antidepressant better than another.

Starting your antidepressant

Take your antidepressant medicine every day at about the same time(s).

Often you will start to feel better within 2 to 4 weeks of starting an antidepressant, but it can take 6 to 8 weeks to feel the full effect.

Make regular appointments with your doctor so you can talk about your progress.

Continuing your antidepressant

Once you are feeling better on an antidepressant, your doctor will let you know how long you need to take your antidepressants for.

You will usually need to keep taking it for another 6 to 12 months to reduce the risk of your depression coming back.

Managing side effects

While all antidepressants have potential side effects (unusual changes in your body), you may not experience them.

Different people can respond quite differently to the same antidepressant.

Some side effects of antidepressants, such as sleep problems or nausea (feeling sick), go away after a few weeks of starting your antidepressant. Taking your medicine with food or milk might help if you get nausea.

Stopping your antidepressant

You must talk to your doctor before you stop or take less of your antidepressant. Stopping antidepressants suddenly can cause symptoms such as dizziness, nausea or feeling jittery. When it's time to stop taking your antidepressant, you will need to reduce the dose gradually over a few weeks. Your doctor will work out a dose reduction plan that is right for you and your medicine.

Other medicines and your antidepressant

Sometimes it is not safe to take other medicines, including pharmacy and herbal medicines, with your antidepressant, eg, cough and cold preparations and St John's wort. Always tell your doctor and pharmacist about all the medicines you take.

Contact your health professional

Speak with your doctor, pharmacist or other health professional if you are:

- ▶ having trouble with side effects from your antidepressant
- ▶ feeling worse, or thinking about harming yourself or suicide.

For more information

Visit the NPS MedicineWise website:
www.nps.org.au/depression

Visit the beyondblue website:
www.beyondblue.org.au

Call the NPS Medicines Line: **1300 MEDICINE** (1300 633 424) (Monday to Friday 9 am – 5 pm AEST) to speak with a health professional for free independent information about medicines.

Call Lifeline: **131 114** (24 hours, 7 days a week) to speak with a health professional for personal crisis support and suicide prevention services.