



# depression and diabetes

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is not just a low mood, but a serious illness. People with depression find it hard to carry out normal activities and function from day to day. Depression has serious effects on physical as well as mental health.

## ARE THERE LINKS BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND DIABETES

Research indicates there are strong links between depression and diabetes. Depression is very common – one in five people will have depression at some time in their adult lifetime. For people who live with diabetes, this figure is even higher.

- Research shows that having diabetes more than doubles the risk of developing depression. Living with a chronic illness like diabetes, coping with biological and hormonal factors, plus needing to manage the condition, may increase the risk of depression, along with the threat of developing complications such as damage to the eyes (retinopathy), nerves (neuropathy) and kidneys (nephropathy).
- Conversely, depression can double the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes. This may be due to elevated stress hormones and weight gain, as people with depression are often inactive.
- Depression can also increase the likelihood of developing diabetes complications. People with depression may find it hard to deal with everyday tasks. Over time, managing diabetes (regular blood glucose testing, taking medication, following a healthy eating plan and needing 'to do' regular physical activity) can take its toll. This may increase a person's risk of depression, which may in turn lead to their usual diabetes care being neglected.

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## HOW IS DEPRESSION DIFFERENT FROM SADNESS?

A person may be depressed, if for more than two weeks they have...

- felt sad, down or miserable most of the time OR
- lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities and
- experienced symptoms in at least three of the following four categories:

### 1. Behaviour

- Stopped going out
- Not getting things done at work
- Withdrawn from family and friends
- Relying on alcohol and sedatives
- Stopped doing things they enjoyed
- Unable to concentrate

### 2. Thoughts

- "I'm a failure."
- "It's my fault."
- "Nothing good ever happens to me."
- "I'm worthless."
- "Life is not worth living."

### 3. Feelings

- Overwhelmed
- Guilty
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Unhappy
- Indecisive
- Disappointed
- Miserable
- Sad, tearful

### 4. Physical

- Tired all the time
- Sick and run down
- Headaches and muscle pains
- Churning gut
- Sleep disturbance
- Poor appetite/weight loss

## CAN DEPRESSION BE TREATED

There is a range of effective treatments for depression. However, depression must first be recognised and diagnosed in order for it to be treated. Treatments include:

- medication to relieve the symptoms of depression
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to learn to identify and change negative thought patterns
- Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) to assist with the acceptance of having a chronic illness and the need for long-term treatment, and to improve relationships.

It is important that any current medication for illnesses other than diabetes, including over-the-counter medications and complementary medications, are also reviewed prior to commencing medication for depression. Antidepressant medication can take seven to 21 days to work effectively and should not be stopped without medical advice.

## WHAT TREATMENTS ARE THERE FOR PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION AND DIABETES?

The treatment for diabetes and depression involves a coordinated approach that monitors both diabetes control and the symptoms of depression. It is about finding the treatment that works best for each person. For example, people with diabetes and mild depression may find that regular physical activity improves depressed moods and also helps with blood glucose control.

The most effective treatments are those that combine psychological and medical care, medical monitoring, individualised diabetes education and adequate community support.

Your doctor or treating health professional will take into account several factors when suggesting the most suitable treatment for you. Regular contact with and ongoing assessment by your doctor, to check that your treatments are working effectively, is an important part of becoming and staying well.

**WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF?**

If you suspect you might have depression, help yourself by:

- going to a doctor or other health professional
- getting involved in social activities
- doing some regular exercise
- learning about depression and diabetes
- eating healthily and including a wide variety of nutritious foods
- achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- limiting your alcohol intake
- getting help, support and encouragement from family and friends
- asking your doctor to check your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose levels.

**WHERE TO GET HELP**

- A doctor who is a general practitioner (GP) is a good first port of call. In some cases, the person may be referred to a mental health specialist like a psychiatrist or psychologist. For a list of GPs with expertise in treating depression and related disorders visit the beyondblue website [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and click on Find a Doctor.
- Psychiatrists are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychological assessments, conduct medical tests and prescribe medication. Some psychiatrists use psychological treatments like CBT or IPT.
- Psychologists specialise in providing non-medical (psychological) treatment for depression and related disorders. To find a psychologist, contact your local Community Health Centre or for a referral to a private psychologist, contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 or [www.psychology.org.au/psych/referral\\_service](http://www.psychology.org.au/psych/referral_service)

**beyondblue: the national depression initiative**

- [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)  
Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and where to get help
- beyondblue info line 1300 22 4636  
Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and referral only (local call)
- [www.ybblue.com.au](http://www.ybblue.com.au)  
beyondblue's website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend

- **The OzHelp Foundation**

1300 OZHELP (1300 694 357)

[www.ozhelp.org.au](http://www.ozhelp.org.au)

- **BeyondBlue**

For information about depression, anxiety and related drug and alcohol problems visit

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) or call the *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* info line on 1300 22 4636

- **Mensline Australia**

1300 789 978 or [www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)

24 hour support for men with family and relationship problems especially around family breakdown or separation – this service provides anonymous telephone support, information and referral. (local call)

- **Lifeline**

13 11 14

24 hour counselling, information and referral (local call)

- **Lifeline's "Just Ask"**

1300 13 11 14

Rural Mental Health Information Service

- **SANE Helpline**

1800 18 7263 (Monday to Friday 9am–5pm)

[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org) Information about mental illness, where to go for support and help for carers

- **Moodgym**

[www.moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://www.moodgym.anu.edu.au) Online psychological therapy

- **Climate.tv – interactive e-health**

[www.climate.tv](http://www.climate.tv) Developed by medical experts, this is a self-management system for people with depression and anxiety

- **CRUFAD**

[www.crufad.org](http://www.crufad.org) Information about depression, anxiety and its management

**ABOUT DIABETES**

- **Diabetes Australia**

1300 136 588

[www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

Information about diabetes

[www.diabetescounselling.com.au](http://www.diabetescounselling.com.au)

[www.health.gov.au/pq/diabetes](http://www.health.gov.au/pq/diabetes)

**THINGS TO REMEMBER**

- Depression and diabetes are both common and treatable.
- Help is available.
- With the right treatment, most people recover from depression.
- It's important to seek help early – the sooner the better.
- Depression is an illness, not a weakness and people shouldn't feel ashamed to seek help.



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing