

Understanding Depression

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What is Depression?

- Everyone feels sad sometimes. Depression is different. It is when low mood or loss of interest lasts most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, along with some of the other signs below, and it makes daily life harder.
- It affects how you think, feel, sleep, eat and get things done.
- Depression is a real health condition. It is not a weakness, and it is not your fault.

Common Signs

- Feeling sad, empty or down.
- Losing interest in things you used to enjoy.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Eating more or less than usual.
- Feeling tired, with little energy.
- Finding it hard to think, focus or make decisions.
- Feeling worthless or guilty.
- Thoughts of death or suicide.

Why does it happen?

- There is usually no single cause. It is a mix of things. Genes play a part. Depression can run in families, but genes are only part of the story. Stressful events, like loss, conflict, bullying or big changes, can also play a part.
- You may have heard that depression is caused by a "chemical imbalance". Scientists now know it is more complicated than that.

What keeps it going: the depression cycle

- When we feel low, we often do less: we see people less, stop hobbies and stay in bed. Doing less means fewer good moments, so we feel even lower.
- The good news is that the cycle can be broken by slowly doing more, even when you don't feel like it.



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What helps

- Talking therapy. Therapies like CBT and behavioural activation work well for depression, and several types of talking therapy work about as well as each other.
- Moving your body. Walking, running, strength training and yoga all help. Harder exercise helps more, but any movement counts. Pick something you will keep doing.
- Sleep. Better sleep leads to better mood. Your psychologist can help with sleep.
- Food. Eating a bit healthier can help mood a little. You don't need a special diet.
- Medicine.
  - For adults, antidepressant medicines can help, and medicine plus talking therapy often works better than either one alone.
  - For people under 18, talking therapy is usually tried first. Medicine is used more carefully and with close check-ups.
  - Talk to your GP about medicine. Don't start or stop medicine without talking to your doctor.

Small steps to try this week

- Plan one small enjoyable or useful activity each day.
- Get outside and move your body for 10–20 minutes.
- Keep regular times for going to bed and getting up.
- Reach out to one person you trust.
- Notice harsh thoughts about yourself, and ask: "Would I say this to a friend?"

If you are thinking about suicide or hurting yourself

- These thoughts are common with depression, and they can get better with help.
- Talking about suicide is safe. It does not make things worse, and it can help.
- Tell someone: your psychologist, your GP, or a trusted adult or friend.
- Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24/7)
- Kids Helpline (ages 5–25): 1800 55 1800 (24/7)
- Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467
- 13YARN (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support): 13 92 76
- In an emergency, call 000.

This sheet gives general information and doesn't replace advice from your health professional. Reviewed Oct 2026.