

Depression is more than just a low mood

Everyone feels a bit down now and then, especially when things are going wrong.

But depression is more than just a low mood; it can be a serious illness. (The medical name for this is major depressive disorder). An episode of depression is serious if it lasts for more than two weeks – when the person feels miserable most of the day, nearly every day.

Depression can vary in how severe it is, and it affects everyone differently. People with severe depression often find it really hard to cope from day-to-day. Milder forms of depression will reduce a person's quality of life, and without support, may become more serious. Depression can affect both physical and mental health.

+ the warning signs

The experience of depression is different for each person, but there are common symptoms.

A person may be depressed if they have:

Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, or lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities, for **more than two weeks**.

Other signs of depression include:

- Irritability and grumpiness.
- Loss of energy and feeling tired.
- Sleep problems – too much or not enough.
- Changes in appetite and weight – losing or gaining weight.
- Blaming yourself and feeling worthless.
- Problems with concentration and making decisions.
- Loss of interest in sex.
- Feelings of emptiness or loneliness.
- Thinking about death.

If you want to talk to someone who can help:

Call the Depression Helpline on **0800 111 757**

Text The Lowdown team for free on **5626**

Or talk to your doctor

Often people with depression also experience constant worry (anxiety). This can cause physical symptoms like pain, a pounding heart or stomach cramps. In some people these physical symptoms are their main concern. Some people may feel so bad they wish they were dead.

How long does it last?

In most cases, severe episodes of depression will go on for weeks or months if left untreated. Depression is also highly likely to happen again if it isn't properly treated and it may happen again anyway. It's important to find the right help.

How common is depression?

It's very common. One in six New Zealanders will experience a major depressive disorder at some time in their life. It's more common among females (one in five females, compared to one in eight males). One in seven young New Zealanders experience a major depressive disorder before the age of 24. Depression increases the risk of suicide by 20 times.

+ what can cause it

There's no simple answer to this – usually it's a combination of things that happen to a person. Research indicates that ongoing difficulties, such as long term unemployment, alcohol problems, chronic illness, or living in an abusive or uncaring relationship, are more likely to cause depression than recent stressful situations. Sometimes there's no obvious reason. But certain factors can put you at higher risk. These include:

Family

- A family or personal history of depression.
- Conflict or violence within your family.
- Bad things that happened when you were a child.



> Events

- Death or loss of someone close.
- Breaking up with a partner.
- Falling out with someone you care about.
- Traumatic or life threatening events.
- Too much pressure and stress at work, school or university.
- Feeling you're being bullied or undermined.
- Losing your job or being unemployed for a long time.
- Having a head injury or other trauma, epilepsy, or a long term or serious illness.
- Some women experience depression during or after childbirth.

Lifestyle

- Drinking too much alcohol.
- Using a lot of recreational drugs such as cannabis.
- Social isolation.
- Lack of sleep.
- Poor diet and lack of exercise.

+ finding a way through

Different types of depression require different types of treatments and it's important to find out what works for you. For mild depression, self-help strategies (things like regular physical exercise) can be really helpful. (See Fact Sheets 11 and 13.)

For more severe depression your GP can help decide whether medication and/or psychological therapies can help. (See Fact Sheet 15.)

+ protecting yourself from depression

There are many things you can do that can help protect you from getting depressed. These include:

- Staying fit and healthy.
- Reducing alcohol use.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Having balance in your life – identifying and managing stress.
- Spending time with people you like and trust, and doing things you usually enjoy.
- Developing skills like problem-solving and communication.

+ getting help

If you want to talk to a trained counsellor about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can:

- **Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757**
- **Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626**

They can listen to your story, and come up with ideas about what might help. They can also put you in touch with health professionals close to where you live, if that's what you want.

Or for more information you can visit:

www.depression.org.nz or www.thelowdown.co.nz

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge information sourced from: NZ Mental Health Survey 2006, NZ Guidelines Group, Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists, MaGPIe Research Group, Beyond Blue (Australia).

For more information and fact sheets visit
www.depression.org.nz