Depression: Types, Causes & Symptoms

It’s normal to feel sad or down from time to time. Sometimes, though, these feelings can be more intense or last longer than usual. When this happens, it may be a sign of depression, which can affect both physical and mental wellbeing. Depression can take different forms, and the approach to management may vary.

This webpage is intended to provide general information about depression, including research on possible contributing factors such as lifestyle and nutrition. Psychologists at this clinic focus on psychological support as part of a broader, evidence-based approach to mental health. They do not provide specific advice on diet or nutrition, but may suggest seeing a dietitian or nutritionist if this could be helpful for you.

Depression isn’t just one thing. It comes in different forms, and the symptoms can range from mild to very disabling. Knowing the various types can help you understand what you or someone close to you might be experiencing.
Many people mask their feelings and do not share them; This makes it difficult to tell what someone id feeling and struggling with inside.



Major Depression

This type involves a low mood that sticks around for at least two weeks and makes it hard to do everyday things. People may lose interest in activities, have trouble with sleep or appetite, feel tired, or experience thoughts of worthlessness.

Melancholic Depression

A more severe form of depression, melancholia includes a complete loss of pleasure in almost everything and noticeable slowing down of thoughts and movements.

Psychotic Depression

Sometimes, depression can come with symptoms like seeing or hearing things that aren’t there or holding beliefs that aren’t true. These experiences can make depression harder to treat and usually need a combination of supports. Psychotic depression requires assessment and treatment by a psychiatrist.

Antenatal & Postnatal Depression

Depression can occur during pregnancy (antenatal) or after having a baby (postnatal). There’s some evidence that nutrition, including omega-3 levels, might play a role.

Bipolar Depression

Bipolar disorder involves episodes of both depression and mania (periods of high energy and mood). It’s important to look for signs of both, as this helps with an accurate diagnosis.

Cyclothymic Disorder

This is a milder, long-lasting version of bipolar disorder, with mood swings that aren’t as extreme.

Dysthymia

Also called persistent depressive disorder, dysthymia features milder symptoms that last two years or more.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

SAD is depression that’s linked to changes in seasons, most often starting in winter. Reduced sunlight can be a factor, and light therapy is sometimes used to help.

Causes of Depression

Depression can have many causes. It often happens when stress builds up beyond a person’s ability to cope, leading to feelings of hopelessness. Both ongoing life stress (like job loss or relationship difficulties) and sudden events can play a part, especially if someone has a family history or certain personality traits. Poor diet and environmental factors may also influence risk.

Signs and Symptoms

A diagnosis of depression generally requires ongoing low mood and loss of interest in things, plus other symptoms like sleep or appetite changes, low energy, trouble concentrating, or thoughts of worthlessness or suicide, lasting for at least two weeks.

Common Behaviours

- Withdrawing from friends and family

- Losing interest in usual activities
- Struggling to complete tasks at home, work, or school
- Using alcohol or drugs more than usual
- Difficulty concentrating

Common Feelings

- Overwhelmed
- Guilty
- Irritable or frustrated
- Lacking confidence
- Unhappy or sad
- Indecisive or disappointed

Common Thoughts

- “I’m a failure.”
- “It’s my fault.”
- “Nothing good ever happens to me.”
- “I’m worthless.”
- “Life’s not worth living.”
- “People would be better off without me.”

Physical Symptoms

- Feeling tired all the time
- Headaches or muscle aches
- Upset stomach
- Trouble sleeping
- Changes in appetite or weight

If you or someone you know is struggling, support from a qualified health professional can help.

⚠ If you are in crisis, seek immediate help from emergency services or a helpline.

Emergency Services (Life Threatening)

- **Triple Zero (000)** — Police, Fire, Ambulance (Available 24/7)

Mental Health Crisis and Support Lines

- **Lifeline: 13 11 14** (24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention)
- **Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467** (24/7 telephone and online counselling)
- **Beyond Blue Support Service: 1300 22 4636** (24/7 support for anxiety and depression)
- **Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800** (24/7 support for young people aged 5 to 25)
- **MensLine Australia: 1300 78 99 78** (24/7 support for men)
- **Victorian Mental Health Triage Service: 1300 859 789** (24/7; connects you to your local mental health service for urgent help)

For Immediate Medical Care

- Go to your nearest hospital Emergency Department.

These services are confidential, free, and available to anyone in Melbourne or across Victoria. If you're ever unsure, calling Triple Zero (000) is the fastest way to get urgent help.

Assessment and Support at BNC

If you recognise these signs in yourself or someone you care about, our psychologists can provide a thorough assessment and evidence-based, individualised treatment — in person at our Doncaster clinic or by Telehealth (Zoom). You can access support through referrals from parents, carers, GPs, or other health professionals. With a referral and

Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP) from your GP, or a referral from a psychiatrist, you may be eligible for Medicare rebates for up to 10 sessions per calendar year.

If you're concerned about depression in a child specifically, see our page on the Signs of Childhood Depression. Depression and anxiety frequently co-occur — read more on our Panic Attacks and Anxiety Disorders page.

Frequently Asked Questions

What's the difference between major depression and dysthymia?+

Major depression involves more intense symptoms that typically last at least two weeks, while dysthymia (persistent depressive disorder) involves milder, longer-lasting symptoms that persist for two years or more. Some people experience both, sometimes called "double depression".

What is melancholic depression?+

Melancholic depression is a more severe form of depression involving a near-complete loss of pleasure in almost everything, along with a noticeable slowing of thoughts and movements. It usually requires a comprehensive treatment approach.

Can depression occur without an obvious cause?+

Yes. While depression often follows stressful life events, it can also occur without a clear trigger, particularly where there is a family history, certain personality traits, or biological factors involved.

What's the difference between depression and bipolar disorder?+

Bipolar disorder involves episodes of both depression and mania (periods of unusually high energy or mood), whereas depression alone does not include manic episodes. Correctly identifying which is present is important, as treatment approaches differ.

Is seasonal affective disorder treated differently to other depression?+

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is generally treated with similar evidence-based approaches to other forms of depression, though light therapy is sometimes used specifically to address the reduced sunlight exposure associated with SAD.

When should I seek help for depression?+

If low mood, loss of interest, or other symptoms persist for two weeks or more and are affecting your daily life, relationships, work or school, it's a good time to speak with a psychologist or your GP. Seek immediate help if you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide or self-harm.

Is depression treatable?+

Yes. Depression is highly treatable, particularly with evidence-based psychotherapy such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, often combined with lifestyle support and, where appropriate, medical management.

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