

DEPRESSION

WHAT EXACTLY IS IT AND HOW DO YOU TREAT IT?

- We can all feel sad and blue at times, but most times we recover quickly. When a doctor uses the term ‘Depression’ we are talking about something more complex and more severe than feeling really sad and it lasts longer.
- Depression is very common – we know that close to 15% of people will need treatment for depression at some point in their lives.
- It is not always easy to tell when we are depressed. Apart from our emotions, other signs of depression could be changes in our behaviour, physical health or thinking.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

This table contains a list of common symptoms. When a person is Depressed, they are likely to have a mix of several of these.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">BEHAVIOUR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding contact with other people • Difficulty getting motivated to do your usual activities • Reduced interest in things you used to enjoy • Increased use of drugs (cigarettes, alcohol or others) • Crying (or difficulty crying even if you want to) | <p style="text-align: center;">PHYSICAL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling tired; reduced energy • Changes in sleep (broken sleep, waking early, or sleeping a lot) • Changes in appetite (not hungry or over-eating or both) • Loss of interest in sex • Experiencing more aches and pains • Menstrual irregularities |
| <p style="text-align: center;">THINKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative thoughts about yourself, your life or the future • More self-critical than usual • Thinking about death more than usual – even your own death • Trouble concentrating, and slowed thinking or trouble making decisions • Persistent worrying | <p style="text-align: center;">EMOTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling miserable, flat, down, sad • Feeling worthless, useless, like a burden • Almost no positive emotions like interest, pleasure, enthusiasm or love • Feeling irritable; worse temper than usual • Feeling unable to cope with normal demands – overwhelmed • Feeling anxious or worried |

Why Me? How does a person get depressed?

Depression is common and we know just about anybody can become depressed. The most common pathway into severe depression is through a person going through multiple and prolonged stressful life events. When things go wrong and then more keeps going wrong, it starts to affect our internal biochemistry as well as our morale.

There are other reasons why some people get depressed. Having another condition like an anxiety disorder adds to depression. Traumatic events (recently in adulthood or long ago in childhood) can have the same impact and trigger a depression. There are certain personality styles that make a person more vulnerable to depression as well. One main personality style is obsessional perfectionism. This is where a person has strict all-or-nothing way of thinking, and they set high standards for themselves and others and hold these rigidly. People who are anxious about their ability to cope and who feel dependent on others can also be vulnerable to depression.

How is depression treated?

Depression is affected by psychological factors and may also involve biological changes. It is often best treated with a combination of (a) biological or medical and (b) psychological treatments.

A. Medical Treatments: ANTIDEPRESSANTS

- ✓ Antidepressants are safe and work for most people. They are not addictive
- ✓ People usually need to take antidepressants for 6-12 months for Depression.
- ✓ Antidepressants don't work straight away – it may take 4 or so weeks to get the maximum benefits.
- ✓ They are also helpful with anxiety and obsessional worry.
- ✓ There are a number of different antidepressants. Ask your doctor for more information about these helpful medications.

B. Psychological Treatment: COGNITIVE-BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

- ✓ Talking to a fully qualified psychologist can make a huge difference. In addition to '*counseling*', there are a number of different approaches to *psychological therapy* and the best evidence is for cognitive-behaviour therapy (CBT).
- ✓ CBT is an active, solution-focused mode of psychotherapy. That means that the focus is mostly on changing things in your emotional and social world now, rather than just analysing the past.
- ✓ In CBT, the client learns how to use the power of the mind (in thinking or 'cognition') to ease worries and negativity. You also learn how to use some of the principles of 'behavioural activation' to fight depression. We also focus on solving real problems and dealing with difficult relationships.
- ✓ In CBT, you will learn how to *prevent* depression from coming back in the future!

If you want to discuss treatment with a fully qualified psychologist, you can call
Basten & Associates, Clinical Psychologists on 9891-1766.
www.bastenpsychology.com.au