



Royal Flying Doctor Service  
QUEENSLAND SECTION

# depression

A guide to depression from the RFDS

RFDS OUTBACK MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE • FEBRUARY 2020



## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

It is normal in life to experience difficult, sad or low periods. Having a bad day or hearing bad news can have an impact on wellbeing and mood. Most of the time people can bounce back, however for some people the impact can become more severe or enduring.

Depression can happen to anyone. Different factors that make it more likely to happen are biological make up, upbringing and reaction to life events. Often what keeps it going is how it's dealt with because the way we think and what we do affects how we feel.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

If symptoms of depression are severe, last for two weeks or more, and affect functioning at home or at work it is recommended to see a health professional.

Depression can impact:

### Thoughts

People who are depressed tend to think very negatively about themselves, the future and the world around them such as:

- > "Everything is hopeless – nothing can change"
- > "I'm useless, worthless"
- > "It's all my fault"
- > "The world is a terrible place – everything goes wrong"

They tend to dwell on these thoughts repeatedly, mulling over things, asking why, thinking regretful things about the past, what they should or shouldn't have done.

### Physical Sensations

Depression can cause a range of changes and disruption with the body including:

- > Tiredness, fatigue, lethargy
- > Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- > Sleep changes (sleep more or less)
- > Eating changes (eat more or less)
- > Loss of interest in hobbies, activities, sex

### Behaviours

Because of the tiredness, difficulty sleeping and eating, and negative style of thinking it is common for depressed individuals to stop doing things they would normally do or increase destructive behaviours including:

- > Not going out anymore
- > Not getting things done at work/school
- > Withdrawing from close family and friends
- > Relying on alcohol and sedatives
- > Not doing usual enjoyable activities

## DEPRESSION CAN BE A VICIOUS CYCLE

Changes in normal activity, decreased motivation and increase in negative thinking can all work together to maintain depression. When activity levels decrease so does motivation and feelings of fatigue are enhanced due to inactivity.

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Withdrawing from usual enjoyable activities often means missing out on building new positive experiences, memories and pleasant feelings. This can also lead to feeling ineffective or guilty thus worsening depression. When your activity level decreases, you may become even less motivated and more lethargic. It is therefore important to explore ways of breaking the cycle.

## EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

### Do things differently:

If lack of activity and tiredness is helping to maintain negative thinking, and therefore continuing feelings of depression then doing more (despite feeling tired and depressed) can assist in feeling better:

- > Do something different (to what you normally do)
- > Do something enjoyable or useful
- > If unmotivated, try an activity for just 5 minutes
- > Be with or contact others
- > Focus attention outside of yourself and your situation e.g. help others
- > Relaxation techniques – try lots and find one that works for you
- > Put on some music – sing and dance along, or just listen attentively (use music that is likely to help you feel your desired emotion – avoid sad songs if you're depressed)
- > Talk to someone
- > Grounding techniques – look around you, what do you see, hear, smell, sense? Hold a comforting object
- > Physical exercise – walk, swim, go to the gym, cycle
- > Engage in a hobby or other interest – if you don't have one, find one! What have you enjoyed in the past? What have you sometimes thought about doing but not got around to?
- > Write down your thoughts and feelings – get them out of your head
- > Just take one step at a time – don't plan too far ahead

### Utilising the ACE Approach

The ACE approach can be an effective way of managing mood and improving wellbeing.

Engage in activities that provide:

**A**chievement

**C**loseness to others

**E**njoyment

An activity planner can assist in scheduling these types of activities into each week.

### Thinking differently

Noticing and trying to catch negative thoughts is an effective first step towards adapting those thoughts. Below are some effective ways of trying to pull back and put some perspective on any negative ideas that may be forming. There is always an alternative way of viewing a situation. It can be helpful to consider the following:

- > What am I reacting to? What have I been thinking about here?
- > Is this fact or opinion?
- > Am I getting things out of proportion?
- > How important is this really? How important will it be in 6 months' time?
- > Am I expecting something from this person or situation that is unrealistic?
- > What's the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
- > What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?
- > Am I spending time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future? What could I do right now that would help me feel better?
- > Am I putting more pressure on myself or setting expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?
- > What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise?
- > Am I just focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen? What would be more realistic?
- > Am I exaggerating the good aspects of others, and putting myself down? Or am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How would someone else see it? What's the bigger picture?
- > Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?
- > What would be the consequences of doing what I normally do?
- > Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for the other person)

For further advice specific to your situation, or to find out more about Outback Mental Health services in your area, email **outback@rfdsqld.com.au** or call **1300 010 174**.



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