



**headspace**  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation

# Depression



## Normal feelings vs. depression

We all feel sad or 'down' from time to time – it's part of being human.

For young people, it's normal to have occasional mood swings, feel irritable sometimes, and to be sensitive to rejection and criticism.

This can make it harder to tell whether you're experiencing "normal" feelings or whether you are becoming depressed.



## What is depression?

Depression is one of the most common health issues for young people in Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Depression ("major depression") is a mental illness characterised by feelings of sadness that lasts longer than usual, affect most parts of your life and stop you enjoying the things that you used to.

## Symptoms of depression

You may be experiencing depression if, for more than two weeks, you've felt sad, depressed or irritable most of the time, or you've lost interest or pleasure in your usual activities. Other symptoms may include:



Loss of interest in food or eating too much, leading to weight loss or gain



Having trouble sleeping (getting to sleep and/or staying asleep), or oversleeping and staying in bed most of the day



Feeling tired most of the time, or lacking energy and motivation



Difficulty concentrating and making decisions



Feeling worthless or guilty a lot of the time



Feeling everything has become 'too hard'



Having thoughts of death or suicide

People with depression might have other mental or physical health problems as well, such as anxiety, or using cigarettes, alcohol or illegal drugs excessively.



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## Getting help for depression

Even though it may seem hard, it is important to talk with someone that you trust about how you feel. You could talk with a parent, teacher, school counsellor, family member or friend. A general practitioner (GP) is another good place to start when seeking help and information.

Most people are able to recover from depression with the right help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can recover.



An important part of professional support is often psychological therapy. Psychological ('talking') therapy focuses on helping you to build skills to deal with the stresses in your life and change negative thinking patterns. Antidepressant medications can also be added if they are needed. Depending on the type of treatment most people start to feel better or notice an improvement after about two to six weeks.



Apart from seeking professional help there are a number of things you can do to maintain good mental health. Regular physical exercise, eating well, practising relaxation, expressing your feelings, and doing things that you enjoy are just some of the things that can help. For more tips on looking after yourself, visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au) to download the 'Tips for a healthy **headspace**' fact sheet.



## IMPORTANT!



If you have thoughts of suicide or plans to harm yourself, it's really important to seek immediate help. Talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend or teacher. There are health professionals at **headspace** centres and **ehheadspace** (online and phone support) who can help you to work out a plan to keep you safe.

## Depression – suicide and self harm



Depression is one of the main risks for suicide and self harm.

If someone you know is self harming or talking about suicide try to arrange some support from close, trusted friends or family. Help the person be safe and remove dangerous things like tablets, guns or other weapons and try to encourage them to see a health professional. If in doubt, don't be afraid to **call 000**.



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For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

**References:** <sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Young Australians: their health and wellbeing, Canberra, 2007.

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