

Mental & emotional health

Depression

Depression affects one in five Australians. Depression is more than feeling sad or blue, it's a condition that can stop you doing everyday activities and change the way you think, feel and behave. If you experience some of the following symptoms over a period of two weeks you may be depressed and it's important to seek help.

- **Physical:** sleep disturbance, changes in eating, headaches, loss of energy
- **Feelings:** depressed mood most of the time, sense of hopelessness, anxiety, feelings of heaviness
- **Thoughts:** unhelpful thoughts such as 'I'm a failure'; 'I'm hopeless'; 'It's all my fault'
- **Behaviours:** withdrawal from social situations, less pleasure or interest in activities you once loved, loss of interest in your appearance

Anxiety

One in four women will experience anxiety at some time in their life. Anxiety involves extreme feelings of fear and worry. There are many different types of anxiety including general anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, post-traumatic stress and obsessive compulsive disorder. If you experience some of the following symptoms, it can help to discuss these with your doctor:

- Excessive worry that is difficult to control
- Increased heart beat, rapid breathing, muscle tension
- Irritability and/or a feeling of restlessness
- Fatigue, difficulty concentrating
- A specific fear of something, eg spiders, flying, being in big open spaces
- Avoidance of things that cause you anxiety.



Stress

Stress occurs when you feel you are not coping with life. One of the biggest causes of stress is change. Normal life events, such as moving or changing jobs, or unexpected events such as illness, loss of a job or an accident can all cause stress.

We all need a little stress to motivate us to achieve or get things done, but too much stress, particularly over a long period of time, can take its toll on your health and sense of wellbeing. Extreme stress can be so overwhelming it causes physical reactions such as nausea, diarrhoea, overeating and undereating. Think about what causes you stress, how you react to it, and if seeking some support may help you.

Grief

There is no single way to grieve and deal with loss. Your response is affected by the strength of your attachment to what you have lost and how that loss occurred.

There are many types of loss including separation, illness, job loss, miscarriage and death. How you react will be influenced by your personality, the way you think, your age and background. There are no rules when it comes to how you manage loss, but it is important to know when to seek help.

What can you do to help your mental & emotional health?

- Keep a diary to help clarify:
 - your symptoms of depression, anxiety or stress
 - the things that trigger feelings of distress
 - what creates positive or negative thoughts for you
- Learn relaxation techniques to help you feel more calm through the day and to provide a coping mechanism in times of stress and distress
- Set small tasks so each day you feel you have achieved something

Remember and focus on the things you achieve each day – even the small things.

- Do more things that make you feel positive: listen to music, sit outside, sit quietly – whatever feels nice for you
- Don't worry about what might happen in the future – take one hour, one day, at a time
- Exercise to stimulate endorphins ('feel-good' hormones) – these can improve your mood and help you cope better with your feelings
- Avoid the highs and lows of sugary and high carbohydrate foods – eat regular small healthy snacks such as raw fruit and vegetables and nuts
- Talk with trusted people if this helps, rather than bottling things up inside
- Spend time with the friends and family members who are easier to be with and make you feel more positive
- Seek information and increase your understanding of depression, anxiety, stress and grief, including the causes and available treatments

- If you feel cut off from others, try:
 - joining a sporting club, hobby group or book club
 - using the internet to connect
 - volunteering with a local charity
- Ask an accredited naturopath about herbs and natural remedies that can help with mood, eg, St John's wort, lavender or lemon balm
- See a doctor and/or psychologist who can assess your symptoms and discuss possible treatments – this might include talking therapies and/or medication.

So many factors can affect your mental and emotional health. It can be hard to accept things have become tough, and to take the first step in changing that, but know that help is available, and change is possible.

Need help right now?

If you are in need of urgent psychological help and need to talk to someone straight away please call **Lifeline on 131 114** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

For more information go to jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/mental-emotional-health and anxiety.jeanhailes.org.au

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

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