

Depression - how to get treatment

Depression affects how you feel about yourself. You may lose interest in work, hobbies or even things that you would normally enjoy most. You may lack energy, have difficulty sleeping or sleep more. Some people feel anxious or irritable and find it difficult to concentrate.

Start with your doctor

If you think you may be depressed, your doctor is the best place to start. Your doctor can do a medical assessment and check that there are no other conditions that may be responsible for your symptoms. Your doctor can also check for more serious forms of depression that may need prompt specialist help.

You can discuss options for treatment. Your doctor might prescribe medication or refer you to a different health professional for therapy. It is important for you to discuss treatment and any concerns or questions you have with your doctor to make sure you are comfortable with the path they suggest. It is a good idea to book an extended consultation, to give you time to discuss your symptoms and treatment options.

You may be referred to a psychiatrist

Some doctors refer patients to a psychiatrist, because they may feel the psychiatrist is more familiar with the most appropriate treatment. Psychiatrists can provide therapy as well as medication if necessary and can often spend more time with you than your general practitioner (GP).

However, it can sometimes be difficult to get an appointment with a psychiatrist and you may need to wait some time before you can be seen. Whether this is okay for you will depend on the severity of your depression. If you feel that you need to see someone sooner, let your doctor know and work with them to find a solution.

Psychologists can also help

An option that is often overlooked is to see a psychologist. One of the benefits is that they are able to spend more time with you than a doctor and are specially trained to treat depression by using therapy. While they cannot prescribe medication, you do not need a referral to see them.

The therapist can work with your doctor to treat the depression effectively. You can also access a psychologist through Medicare. This involves your doctor writing a mental health plan – ask your GP for more details.

Try your local community health centre

Another option is your local community health centre. Your local council will have contact details. Most major hospitals also have a psychiatric department with staff available for assessments.

Medication takes time to be effective

If your treatment involves antidepressant medication, it will usually take two to six weeks for the medication to become effective. Antidepressants are safe, effective and not addictive. It is important that you persist with your medication, even if it doesn't seem to be making a difference at first.

Discuss any side effects of the medication or issues you may have with your doctor or therapist. Remember, everyone is different and many people need to try a number of medications before they find one that suits them. So don't give up – keep talking to your doctor about finding medication that works for you.

When you take medication, avoid alcohol as it can increase any sedative effects of the medication. Also, some people drink alcohol to help their symptoms without realising that excessive use may increase their depression.

Where to get help

- [beyondblue](#) Info Line Tel. 1300 22 4636
- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800
- SuicideLine Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251 – for counselling, **crisis intervention, information and referral** (24 hours, 7 days)
- Find a GP near you who specialises in mental health conditions through the [beyondblue](#) website or by telephoning 1300 22 4636
- SANE Mental Health Information Line Tel. 1800 18 7263, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
- Mental Health Foundation Tel. (03) 9427 0407, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Things to remember

- If you feel depressed, see your doctor for an assessment.
- Your doctor, a psychiatrist or a psychologist may be able to help – take the time to find the treatment that's right for you.
- Medications may take up to six weeks to be effective, so be patient.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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