

# STILL GOT THE BLUES?

Understanding and  
managing depression

# Depression.

## The Signs & Symptoms

We can all feel down at times and experience the emotional blows of hardship and heartache – that’s all part of being human. However, depression is when this experience of feeling “down” becomes more or less a semi-permanent state, where feelings of sadness, worthlessness, loss of enthusiasm and extreme lethargy take hold and don’t seem to budge. Someone experiencing depression might feel really low for a long time, and sometimes without much reason.

Depression makes it really hard to enjoy life and connect with others, and it can make everyday tasks, such as getting out of bed or taking a shower, really difficult to do.

### What might depression look & feel like?

A GP or registered psychologist might recognise depression as a problem for you if you report experiencing 5 or more of the following things throughout the past 2 weeks:

- \_\_\_ A depressed or “down” mood for most of the day, where you might be feeling sad, empty, tearful or even numb.
- \_\_\_ A lack of interest in engaging in activities that used to be fun and things that you used to love to do.
- \_\_\_ Significant weight-loss or weight gain.
- \_\_\_ Fatigue, lethargy, and loss of energy and enthusiasm.
- \_\_\_ Weird sleep patterns, either sleeping way too much or not enough.
- \_\_\_ Having a hard time remembering stuff, sluggish thinking, lack of concentration and difficulty focusing.
- \_\_\_ Recurrent feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, helplessness or guilt.
- \_\_\_ Cutting yourself off from friends, family and social spaces.
- \_\_\_ Recurrent thoughts of self-harm and death. (Some people experiencing depression might act in careless or risky ways, putting their life at risk, or attempt to hurt or kill themselves.)

It's important to note that some of these symptoms might also be due to the side-effects of medication, or drug and alcohol use.

# How to be a Good Listener

## when someone you know might be experiencing depression

- Take care of yourself.
- Pick a good moment – somewhere you both feel comfortable.
- Be ready to listen deeply and attentively.
- Rephrase what they've said in your own words to show you're listening and to make a real effort to understand them.
- Validate their feelings and experiences with phrases like *"That sounds tough"* and *"It's normal to feel that way..."*
- Encourage them to explore and expand on feelings with phrases like *"how does that feel for you?"* or *"how long have you been feeling that way?"*
- Don't minimize, judge, or jump to advice-giving and problem-solving mode.
- Be prepared that they might not be ok, they might not want to talk, that you can fix everything for them.
- **Check in. Stay in touch. Let them know you're still there for them.**

# Exercise 1.

## Vowel Movement

When faced with a tricky situation that prompts unhelpful or restrictive automatic thoughts, challenge your thoughts by moving through your vowels.

### **A | Alternatives.**

There's not only one way of thinking about things. What are a few alternatives you can think of? Are there other, more positive ways of looking at the situation?

### **E | Evidence.**

Don't believe everything you think. What evidence do you have to support your thought? What evidence is there that challenges it?

### **I | Implications.**

Okay, so say this thought is true - what are the implications of that? What are the possible outcomes? How would you deal with them?

### **O | Objectivity.**

It's tough to see our own situation or thoughts objectively. Say a mate was in the same situation, how would you see it and how might you support them through it?

### **U | Usefulness.**

How helpful is the automatic thought? What does it do for you? Is it useful to think in such a way?

# Exercise 2.

## Mental Paintball

Set an alarm on your phone for 5-10min. Draw your attention to your breathing and make a mental "note" everytime your attention is hijacked by: **sensing**: "I hear sirens outside", **feeling**: "I feel my stomach grumble" or **thinking**: "This exercise is stupid".

Try not to get judgemental or get swept away while noting any of these experiences (they're not "good" or "bad"), challenge yourself to note them with detached objectivity, E.g. "That's sensing", "That's thinking". It's like mental paintball!

This activity offers an opportunity to become familiar with the contents of your mind - and which types of thoughts are taking up the most real estate.

# Exercise 3.

## Your Non-Negotiables

Our self-care practices are often the first things to fall away when things get overwhelming. However, these practices have a protective quality, where they can help build your resilience, and make you more robust in the face of obstacles and challenges

**List your 5 Self-Care “Non-Negotiables”:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## WHO TO CALL

**SUPPORT ACT WELLBEING HELPLINE: 1800 959 500**

**LIFELINE: 13 11 14**

**BEYOND BLUE: 1300 22 4636**

**SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE: 1300 659 467**

**MENSLINE AUS: 1300 78 99 78**

**If you're concerned for your immediate safety or the safety of others, call 000.**