Depression in one page

What it is

What is depression?

Depression is a health condition where low mood or a loss of interest stays most days and gets in the way of your life. It is common and it can be treated. It is not weakness, and a GP, psychologist or psychiatrist can diagnose it.

- Depression is low mood that does not lift

The signs

What are the symptoms of depression?

The main symptoms of depression are low mood and lost interest, most of the day, for 2 weeks or more. Sleep, appetite, energy and focus often change. If you have thoughts of death, call Lifeline on 13 11 14, or 000 in an emergency.

How a diagnosis happens

How do I get help for depression?

Start with your GP. They can assess your symptoms, rule out other causes, and refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist under Australia's national guideline for mood disorders. If you need to talk before that appointment, Lifeline's phone, text and chat services don't require you to give your name. Getting help doesn't need a crisis first; a GP visit is a normal, low-key first step.

Treatment

Does therapy work for depression?

Yes, talking therapy for depression works, and it is written into Australia's official psychiatric treatment guideline, graded on the same evidence scale used for medication. It will not work in a single session: most approaches need several weeks of regular sessions before you notice real change. The right therapist and the right approach both matter more than trying to push through alone.

Medication

Is therapy or medication better for depression?

Neither is simply better: Australia's psychiatric guideline gives its highest evidence grade to combining talking therapy and medication, finding that together they work better than either alone. Therapy is offered as foundational care to everyone with depression, not just a fallback for mild cases. People tend to prefer therapy, and its benefits often last well beyond the end of treatment.

- Therapy plus medication works better than either alone
- Therapy is offered to everyone, not just mild cases

Who diagnoses and who prescribes

Who can diagnose depression in Australia?

A GP, psychiatrist or psychologist can diagnose depression, and most diagnoses are made by a GP. The difference shows up on paper: some forms accept only a doctor's diagnosis, and a psychologist cannot sign them.

- Some forms need a doctor's diagnosis, not a psychologist's

What it costs

How much does it cost to see a psychologist?

There's no fixed national price. Psychologists set their own fees, and a single session usually costs more than the Medicare rebate covers, so you're left with a gap fee. The exact amount depends on the psychologist, where you live, and whether they bulk bill. Ask the practice for their fee and your rebate before you book.

- Psychologists set their own session fees

In danger? Call 000. Lifeline 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14, or chat online.

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467. Free counselling by phone or video, any hour.

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