

# *Could I be* **DEPRESSED?**

There is a good chance that someone you know, or perhaps even you yourself, has experienced a bout of depression. Many people tell us things like - 'I just can't get motivated to do anything.' 'I don't want to leave the house. I just don't want to talk to anyone.' They might even say - 'I just feel so angry.' 'I cry at the stupidest of things.'

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Life is not always easy, but the first step toward working through these feelings is acknowledging they are there. Knowing a little about depression and its causes can help you to deal with it and get the assistance you need.

Chances are that if your problems have been going on for a while (more than three months), trying to sort it out yourself just won't work. For this reason, the next step is to talk to a professional about your experiences. Your GP is a great start as general practitioners are now required to have training in mental health. A GP can talk to you about what is happening in your life and give you a referral to a psychologist. A GP may even talk to you about the possibility of taking some medication for a while, which can be very helpful.

Family and friends can be great supports, but they are not always in a good position to understand and help. Or perhaps they could be the cause of how you feel. In fact, sometimes they can make the problem worse! For example, they can be biased, enable negative thoughts by treating you like a child, or even tell you unhelpful things like, 'Suck it up' and 'It's all in your head!' This doesn't help! Depression is real. It's not imagined, and you didn't make it up!

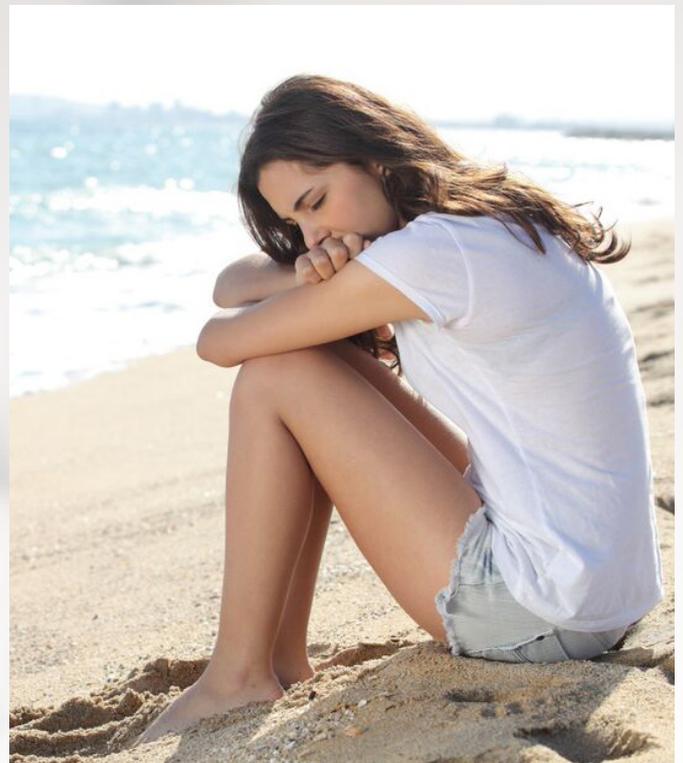
## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

When examining mental health conditions, psychologists use a very comprehensive manual called, 'The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders' or DSM-5 for short. The DSM-5 lists a specific set of criteria to help diagnose depression, some of which are listed below. The following list can help you decide whether you need to consider professional help.

*“Statistics report that most people will experience a bout of depression in their lifetime!”*

## ASK YOURSELF IF YOU:

- Are depressed most of the day, nearly every day
- Have markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all or almost all activities, most of the day
- Suffer from insomnia (not being able to sleep) or hypersomnia (sleeping too much) nearly every day
- Have fatigue or loss of energy
- Experience feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt



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If many of the things on this list ring true for you, you might benefit from chatting with your GP or a mental health professional to help you along this journey. After all challenging journeys can be easier when they are shared. If you would like to complete a test to see if you are depressed, you can go to [www.reconnect-psych.com.au/forms](http://www.reconnect-psych.com.au/forms) and click on the PDF for the DASS 21 (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale). If you score high on any of the scales of Stress, Depression or Anxiety, it is highly recommended that you speak to your GP or a mental health professional.

## HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

There are many reasons why people feel depressed. Sometimes depression can sneak up on you, and there is no obvious known reason. Other times there is no denying why. Things like losing your job, separation from your partner, fighting at home, bullying at work, kids starting school, moving house or other major life changes can cause depression.

Having a baby can lead to Post Natal Depression (PND), and research shows that men can get this too! In such situations the body and mind are trying to cope with major hormonal changes and increased stress, and sometimes we need a little or a lot! -- of help. Statistics report that most people will experience a bout of depression in their lifetime! It might be for only a few months, or it could last a few years without the proper help and medication.

*“Depression  
is real,  
not imagined”*

And, please remember -- not all psychologists are the same. If you feel calm and at ease with your psychologist, it is a good fit. If you feel judged and uncomfortable, try someone else. It's OK if you do; psychologists are different and use different techniques. Your psychologist has to suit your style to work effectively.

Understanding depression is not as complicated as it may seem, once you realize that it's quite common, especially given our busy 21st Century lifestyles. You can take some practical action in your everyday life. If you still feel you need help, there are many options for improving your mental health. For further information about depression and other mental health conditions check out: [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/factsheets](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/factsheets).

## WHAT CAN I DO?

Here are some basic tips on how you can help yourself to recover from depression:

- **Get good advice.** It is most important to seek advice from an appropriate mental health expert.
- **Exercise!** Research shows that exercise stimulates the body and mind. We humans are designed to move. If we don't, we feel more lethargic. It can just be a gentle stroll or a play in the park with the kids.
- **Food and water.** What you put in your body makes a big difference. The brain is 80% water, so if you are not drinking about 8 glasses a day, you are probably dehydrated, which leads to lack of concentration, irritability and fatigue. Food also makes a big difference. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables -- organic if possible -- and cut out processed food. Watch the way you feel after you eat. If you feel tired after a meal, then that food is not good for you.
- **Breath.** Are you breathing from your chest or deep into your gut? Deep breathing helps to regulate the body and calm the mind.
- **Relax.** Take a bath, play music, go for a gentle walk, or mediate. Just slow down! A calm body helps to reset the mind.
- **Talk.** Don't keep it all to yourself. You are not going crazy and you are not alone. It's amazing how just being heard and not judged can make a big difference. It validates your feelings and helps you to take control of your life again.

Leanne Allen (BA Psych) is the principle psychologist at Reconnect Psychology and Coaching Services ([www.reconnect-psych.com.au](http://www.reconnect-psych.com.au)). She has trained in Sandplay Therapy, NLP (Neuro-linguistic programming) and CBT (Cognitive behavioural therapy) and has just completed training as a life coach. Her approach is to look forward whilst releasing the trauma of the past.