Depression is more than just a ‘low mood’. People with depression experience persistent negativity, sadness and difficulty coping. The depressed mood is severe and interferes with our ability to function on a daily basis.

Depression affects one in six people and each year approximately 1 million Australian adults and 100,000 young people live with depression.

There are a number of different types of depression, which can be attributed to biological or psychological events. While the signs and symptoms of each person’s experience is different, there are a number of signs and symptoms to be aware of.

**Signs and symptoms**

There are several signs that a person may have depression.

These include:

- Being less able to control emotions such as irritability, anxiety, anger, guilt or pessimism
- Varying emotions throughout the day
- Lowered energy levels
- Reduced motivation
- Poor concentration
- Changes in weight or appetite
- Change in sleep patterns
- Lowered self-esteem
- Reduced capacity to experience pleasure
- Reduced pain tolerance
- Changed sex drive
- Feelings of guilt or being a burden on others
- Thoughts of suicide or dying.

**Causes**

Depression is not caused just by recent difficult events in a person’s life. Often, it is caused by a combination of recent difficult events and other longer-term personal risk factors. These risk factors can include living in an abusive or uncaring relationship or long-term unemployment. Depression can also run in the family and as such, some people will have an increased genetic risk. This doesn’t mean, however, that a person will automatically become depressed if a parent or close relative has the illness. There are several common medical causes of depression, which include:

- chronic pain
- quitting smoking
- low thyroid function
- some forms of cancer
- brain injuries and diseases (stroke, head injury, epilepsy etc.)
- infectious diseases
- anaemia.

People at increased risk of becoming depressed include:

- perfectionists
- those sensitive to personal criticism
- lifelong worriers
- those who are shy, self-critical or have low self-esteem
- the unassertive.

**Treatments**

If you or someone you know needs immediate help, you can make an emergency appointment with your GP or contact your local public hospital. Alternatively, call: Lifeline on 13 11 14, Kids Help Line on 1800 55 1800 or Mensline on 1300 789 978.

Depending on the type of depression a person experiences, they may require psychological treatment, and/or medication. Psychological treatments are used by psychologists, psychiatrists and mental health nurses and can help a person to recover from and prevent a recurrence of depression.

Examples of psychological treatments include:

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- Interpersonal Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Psychodynamic psychotherapy.

Of these, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is considered one of the most effective.

Medications can be helpful in the treatment of moderate to severe depression and in some anxiety disorders. They can only be prescribed by a doctor.

**References**
