

Fact Sheet – Depression

Depression is a state of sadness, hopelessness and despair that impacts upon a person's capacity to function. Everyone feels flat or sad from time to time, but if the sadness is extreme and lasts for days or weeks or months at a time, and appears to be unrelated to any specific trigger, it may be clinical depression.

Clinical depression, or major depressive disorder, is a state of intense sadness, melancholia or despair that has advanced to the point of disrupting a person's daily life and functioning. A typical picture of a depressed person is someone who has difficulty getting out of bed, has no appetite, no energy even to take a shower or get out of their pyjamas. They don't feel up to going to work or Uni, and don't want to answer the phone or the door, or talk with anyone. They don't do things they used to enjoy. They sleep a lot, and think negatively, perhaps even to the point of contemplating suicide.

How can I tell if I am depressed? Here are some common symptoms:

- Negative thinking – such as being self critical, brooding over things, having trouble concentrating, thinking that life is worthless
- Negative emotions – being teary, listless, bored, cynical, and seeing any display of emotion by others as pretence
- Negative behaviour – difficulty sleeping, eating less or eating the wrong foods, staying at home a lot, self-sabotage, such as denying yourself something or punishing yourself.

If you think you may have depression you should see a doctor or counsellor. They can diagnose and assist you in treating it.

It is noted that the legal profession has a high incidence of depression. Legal professionals need to understand what depression is, and the early warning signs, as well as appropriate steps for getting treatment.

Further information

Beyond Blue: the national depression initiative, <http://www.beyondblue.org.au>

O'Connor, R. *Undoing Depression*, Berkley Books, USA (1999).

Phipps, A.B. *The Good Mood Guide: A Self-help Manual for Depression*, Lifeline South Coast, NSW, Second edition (2004).