



Depression

Depression is the most common mental health condition experienced by Victoria Police members, with almost of a third of employees reporting some symptoms of depression.

Having ups and downs is a normal part of life. We all experience low mood sometimes, in response to events in our workplace, relationships, or just everyday life. Sometimes you can even feel sad when there is no identifiable reason. However, if feelings of sadness last longer than two weeks, are really overwhelming, or are impacting on your daily activities, you may be experiencing depression.

What are the symptoms of depression?

Depression is a health condition that is characterised by a **change in mood**. The mood is often sadness, but some people report that when they are depressed, their mood can be described as numb, flat, anger or irritable. Unlike periods of feeling down – which pass relatively quickly and which everyone feels now and then, depression can feel like a dark cloud is following you everywhere. Sometimes – but not always – it’s hard to find a reason for feeling so down, and people experiencing depression often report that their low mood isn’t just fleeting, or occasional: they feel that way a lot of the time. The change in mood might also feel more intense or severe, or last longer than usual.

Depression isn’t just a change in the way we feel – it is a health condition that is also characterised by **physical symptoms, and changes in our thoughts and behaviour**. These can include:

| Thoughts | Physical changes | Behavioural changes |
|---|---|---|
| Feeling overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or guilt | Feeling physically slowed down | Withdrawing from friends and family |
| “I must be weak to be depressed” | Feeling restless and on edge | Difficulty concentrating and making decisions |
| “I’m a burden on others” | Change in weight | Not engaging in activities you used to enjoy |
| “I’m a failure” | Change in appetite | Lashing out at others |
| “Everything is hopeless and it will always be like this” | Change in sleep pattern | Using alcohol or drugs as a way to cope with painful feelings and thoughts |
| | Loss of interest in sex | Difficulty going to work, low job satisfaction and finding it hard to get work tasks done |
| | Feeling tired and low in energy | |
| | Decreased tolerance for minor aches and pains | |

Most people will have experienced some of these symptoms, at some stage in their life. Each symptom – on its own – can have many different causes. A diagnosis of depression is only made after considering the combination of symptoms that accompany a low mood – their intensity, how long they have lasted, and how they are affecting you. If the symptoms are severe, last for two weeks or more, and affect how you function at home or at work, you may wish to see a health professional.

Tips for managing depression

Monitor your mood

Get to know the ups and downs of your mood – when is it worse? When is it better? Is there anything in particular that makes a difference to how you feel? Developing an awareness of mood fluctuations will help you build on what is working, and plan for times of the day/week that are typically more challenging. A good mood monitoring form can be found on the Black Dog website. Alternatively, a mood tracking app, such as Pocket Mood Tracker, can also be helpful and easily accessible.

Take action

When you are depressed, taking even the smallest of actions can be extremely hard. Often if you wait to feel motivated before doing something, it won't happen. Taking small steps, even if you don't feel like it, can help. What can you do right now, in this moment? Having a shower or collecting the mail sounds like a small task, but can still feel like an accomplishment.

Keep moving

Exercise is one of the most powerful things you can do when feeling depressed. It releases feel-good brain chemicals, and in some cases can be just as effective as medication at relieving symptoms of depression. If the fatigue you are feeling is due to depression, exercise may make you feel more energised, not less. The key is to make it achievable. A 10-minute walk is better than no movement at all. See <https://www.bluespacewellbeing.com.au/help-you/exercise> for guidelines for the recommended amount of physical activity and how to get started.

Stay connected

Depression can make you want to isolate and hide away. People with depression may feel like they are a burden to others or that they don't have the energy to face the world. This is the depression talking! Making time to be with people who care about you helps to maintain the effort required to beat depression.

Challenge your thinking

Depression puts a dark filter over the world and how you see yourself. Learning to identify and challenge depressive thoughts is a powerful skill that can help you see things from a more balanced perspective.

Stay 'in the present'

People with depression often have difficulty engaging with the world, and can be preoccupied with dark thoughts about what has gone wrong in the past, or what might happen in the future. Mindfulness exercises help us to 'be in the present moment', and take a step back from the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that maintain depression. See <https://www.bluespacewellbeing.com.au/help-you/mindfulness> for more information on mindfulness and the various techniques.

Optimise your health

Eat a balanced diet, consume less alcohol, and set up a regular healthy sleep routine. Treating your body well gives you a strong foundation to overcome symptoms of depression. The Bluespace Wellbeing website has further information on nutrition, alcohol intake and sleep.

Optimise your routine

Proactively taking responsibility for scheduling your time can help create a feeling of control. Plan small activities throughout your week that give you a sense of achievement and pleasure, and that will allow you to maintain contact with people who support and care for you. A weekly calendar can help with this.

Treat yourself gently

Depression is an illness. It is not a choice, or a weakness, and you can't just "snap out of it". Like any illness, recovery takes time, and requires planning and support.

When should I seek help?

There are many evidence-based and effective treatments for depression, that are typically provided by a mental health professional, such as a psychologist. Talking to your GP is a useful starting point. A GP can assess any medical causes for your symptoms, and help you find the best treatment provider. It is recommended that you seek support when:

- You have experienced a change in your mood for two weeks or more.
- The change in your mood is accompanied by some of the symptoms listed above.
- Your symptoms are causing you distress, or affecting how you function at home or at work.

If you are having thoughts of death, hurting yourself, ending your life, or you are aware that you are putting yourself or anyone else at risk, you should [seek help immediately](#).

In addition to a change in mood, symptoms of depression include:

- Loss of interest or pleasure in the activities that you usually enjoy.
- Increase or decrease in appetite, weight, or sleep.
- Feeling tired or exhausted.
- Difficulty concentrating and remembering.
- Loss of interest in sex.
- Reduced motivation.
- Feeling overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness, pessimism, anger, guilt, or anxiety.
- Preoccupation with death, which could include thoughts of suicide.

For some, there may be a belief that depression is linked to weakness. However, under the right circumstances and stressors, anyone can experience depression. It is a strong move to talk and seek support early to learn how to manage what is happening, rather than letting things snowball.



**Alcohol and Drug
Information Services VIC**
1800 888 236



Turning Point
www.turningpoint.org.au



Police Wellbeing Services
1300 090 995