

Seeing depression as a health issue for men

Depression can affect anybody, but it is less likely to be noticed by men or the people around them. If depression isn't detected, then it can't be treated, and it has the potential to become severe and disabling. Depression is also a known risk factor for suicide.

Although men are more likely than women to recognise the physical symptoms of depression, such as feeling tired and irritable, they are less likely to think of this as depression.

Some men may expect they will always be physically and mentally strong and self reliant, and experiencing depression can be seen as a weakness rather than a common health issue.

Men generally tend to put off getting help for health problems, and this is probably even more so for mental health issues. They think they should be able to handle the problems themselves or 'harden up' and get over it. Unfortunately a lot of men manage their symptoms by using too much alcohol, or recreational drugs, which make the symptoms worse.

Depression is very common – over our lifetimes, one in eight men, and one in five women will experience an episode of major depressive disorder in New Zealand. Many more will experience less severe forms of depression, which will nevertheless have negative impacts on their lives and the lives of those around them.

Depression can have very serious consequences for men and their families, especially if it's not recognised and proper treatment and support provided. The rate of male suicides in New Zealand is very high - three to four times higher than the rate of female suicides. The highest suicide rate in 2006 was for men aged 15-24 years, but it was also high for men aged 55-59 years. See Fact Sheet 4 – Suicide and Self Harm or visit www.moh.govt.nz/suicideprevention for more information.

If you want to talk to someone who can help:

Call the Depression Helpline on **0800 111 757**

Call Mensline on **0800 636 754**

Text The Lowdown team for free on **5626**

Or talk to your doctor

+ what can cause it

- Dependency on recreational drugs and alcohol.
- Chronic physical health problems.
- Relationship/family difficulties and conflict.
- Major life changes, including becoming a father.
- Employment problems.
- Unemployment (especially long term).
- Financial problems.
- Social isolation.
- Separation and divorce.

+ the warning signs

A person may be depressed if they have felt sad and miserable most of the time, or lost interest and pleasure in their usual activities for **more than two weeks**.

While different people have different combinations of other symptoms of depression, the following are common symptoms that help in recognising depression in men.

- Withdrawing from family, friends and activities.
- Becoming restless, unmotivated, or generally slowing down.
- Inability to find pleasure in activities that are usually enjoyed.
- Moodiness or irritability – which can sometimes come across as aggression.
- Feelings of sadness, hopelessness or emptiness.
- Losing self-confidence, feeling like a failure.
- Suicidal thoughts.
- Sleeping more or less than usual.
- Feeling tired all the time.
- Unexplained headaches, backaches or other physical pain.
- Digestive upsets, nausea, changes in bowel habits.
- Significant changes in appetite, and/or weight loss or gain.

If you are concerned that you or someone you care about might be depressed, it's important to get help. Untreated depression can become more severe. It can be hard for men to acknowledge that they have a mental health problem, so they may need some support to get the help they need.

+ what you can do

Different types of depression require different types of treatments and it's important to find a treatment or self help approach that works for you or the person you are supporting. For mild depression, self-help strategies (things like regular physical exercise) can be really helpful. See Fact Sheet 11 – Getting active to beat depression and Fact Sheet 13 – Structured Problem Solving Workbook.

For more severe depression your GP can help decide whether medication and/or psychological therapies can help. See Fact Sheet 15 – Health Professionals and Services and Fact Sheet 16 – Treatment Options.

+ getting help

If you want to talk to a trained counsellor about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can:

- **Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757**
- **Call Mensline (5.30pm – 11pm evenings) on 0800 636 754 (outside Auckland) or (09) 522 2500 (Auckland)**
- **Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626**

They can listen to your story, and come up with ideas about what might help. They can also put you in touch with health professionals close to where you live, if that's what you want.

Or for more information you can visit:

www.depression.org.nz or www.thelowdown.co.nz

The Ministry of Health would like to acknowledge information sourced from: NZ Mental Health Survey 2006, NZ Guidelines Group, Royal Australian and NZ College of Psychiatrists, MaGPIe Research Group, Beyond Blue (Australia).