



Depression and asthma

What is depression?

Depression is not just a low mood, but a serious condition. People with depression find it hard to carry out normal activities and function from day to day. Depression has serious effects on physical as well as mental health.

Are there links between depression and asthma?

Research indicates there is a link between depression and asthma. Depression is very common – one in five people will have depression at some time in their adult lifetime. For people who live with asthma, this figure is even higher. Depression is often associated with other chronic diseases such as asthma and can impact on an individual's health.

As is the case with other chronic diseases, research shows that having severe asthma **more than doubles the risk of developing major depression.**

Recent research revealed that having both depression and asthma worsens health compared with depression alone or asthma alone.

Depression makes it less likely that people's asthma is effectively treated.

People with untreated depression can find it difficult to concentrate and stay motivated. As a result, they may not seek help for asthma, follow their Asthma Action Plan, keep appointments and take medication.

Having asthma can make it hard for people to join in with everyday activities such as playing sport and other recreational activities. This can make people feel unmotivated and socially isolated.

Stress can act as a trigger for symptoms of both asthma and depression.

How is depression different from sadness?

A person may be depressed, if for more than two weeks they have:

- Felt sad, down or miserable most of the time OR;
- Lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities and;
- Experienced symptoms in at least three of the following four categories:

1. Behaviour

- Stopped going out
- Not getting things done at work
- Withdrawn from family and friends
- Relying on alcohol and sedatives
- Stopped doing things they enjoyed
- Unable to concentrate

2. Thoughts

- "I'm a failure."
- "It's my fault."
- "Nothing good ever happens to me."
- "I'm worthless."
- "Life is not worth living."

3. Feelings

- Overwhelmed
- Guilty
- Irritable
- Frustrated
- Unhappy
- Indecisive
- Disappointed
- Miserable
- Sad, tearful

4. Physical

- Tired all the time
- Sick and run down
- Headaches and muscle pains
- Churning gut
- Sleep disturbance
- Poor appetite/weight loss

Can depression be treated?

There is a range of effective treatments for depression. However, depression must first be recognised and diagnosed in order for it to be treated. Treatments include:

- Medication to relieve the symptoms of depression.
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) to learn to identify and change negative thought patterns
- Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) to assist with the acceptance of having a chronic illness and the need for long-term treatment, and to improve relationships.

It is important that any current medication for an illness other than asthma, including over-the-counter medications and complementary medications, are also reviewed prior to commencing medication for depression.

Depression and asthma (continued)

Antidepressant medication can take seven to 21 days to work effectively and should not be stopped without medical advice.

What are the treatments for people with depression and asthma?

The treatment for asthma and depression involves a coordinated approach that monitors both the symptoms of asthma and depression including using an asthma action plan. *It is important to find the treatment that works best for each person.*

The most effective treatments are those that combine psychological and medical care, medical monitoring, individualised asthma education and adequate community support.

It should be noted that while antidepressants seem to have no specific effect on asthma symptoms or medication, the National Asthma Council recommends that people should not take sedatives when having an acute attack of asthma as it may have an effect on breathing.

A doctor or treating health professional will take into account several factors when suggesting the most suitable treatment.

Regular contact with, and ongoing assessment by a doctor, to check that treatments are working effectively is an important part of becoming and staying well.

What can I do to help myself?

- Learn relaxation techniques
- Get involved in social activities that are unlikely to trigger your asthma
- Stay active and exercise under the supervision of a doctor
- Learn about depression and asthma.
- Eat healthily and include a wide variety of nutritious foods
- Limit your substance use (including alcohol and tobacco)
- Get help, support and encouragement from family and friends
- Visit a doctor regularly to review your asthma and depression management

Where to get help

A doctor who is a General Practitioner (GP) is a good place to start. In some cases, the person may be referred to a mental health specialist like a psychiatrist or psychologist. For a list of GPs with expertise in treating depression and related disorders visit the beyondblue website www.beyondblue.org.au and click on 'Find a Doctor' or call the beyondblue information line — **1300 224 636** (local call).

Psychiatrists are doctors who specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychological assessments, conduct medical tests and prescribe medication. Some psychiatrists use psychological treatments like CBT or IPT.

Psychologists specialise in providing non-medical (psychological) treatment for depression and related disorders. To find a psychologist, contact your local Community Health Centre or for a referral to a private psychologist, contact the Australian Psychological Society on **1800 333 497** or www.psychology.org.au/psych/referral_service

If you have been diagnosed as having a mental disorder your regular GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician can refer you to a psychologist. You may be able to claim a Medicare rebate for part of the cost for up to 12 individual and 12 group sessions in a calendar year. For more details ask your referring medical practitioner or visit www.health.gov.au

More information

About Depression

www.beyondblue.org.au

[beyondblue info line 1300 224 636](tel:1300224636) (local call)

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments, where to get help and referral only

www.youthbeyondblue.com

beyondblue's website for young people – information on depression and how to help a friend

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

Provides counseling, information and referral to people at risk of suicide and those concerned about someone else's behaviour

Lifeline

13 11 14

24 hour counselling, information and referral (local call)

Lifeline's Information Service

1300 13 11 14

Rural Mental Health Information Service

SANE Helpline

1800 18 7263 (Monday to Friday 9am–5pm)

www.sane.org

Information about mental illness, where to go for support and help for carers

Moodgym

www.moodgym.anu.edu.au

Online psychological therapy

Climate.tv – interactive e-health

www.climate.tv

Developed by medical experts, this is a self-management system for people with depression and anxiety

CRUFAD

www.crufad.org

Information about depression, anxiety and its management

About Asthma

[Asthma Australia](http://asthmaaustralia.org.au)

asthmaaustralia.org.au

Freecall 1800 645 130

Advice, education, counseling and support for people with asthma and their carers.

Depression and asthma (continued)

For more information contact
Asthma Foundation SA:

Freecall 1800 645 130
asthmasa.org.au

300 South Road, Hilton, 5033

Things to remember

- Depression and asthma are both common and treatable
- Help is available
- With the right treatment, most people recover from depression
- It's important to seek help early – the sooner the better
- Depression is an illness

This fact sheet was jointly developed by *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* and the Asthma Foundation of Victoria.



References

Asthma Foundations of Australia, 2005, *Asthma: The Basic Facts*, Asthma Foundations of Australia

Barton, C., Clarke D., Sulaiman, N., Abramson, M., 2003
"Coping as a mediator of psychosocial impediments to optimal management and control of asthma", *Respiratory Medicine* 97, 747-761.

Goldney, D., Ruffin, R., Fisher, L., Wilson, D. 2003
"Asthma symptoms associated with depression and lower quality of life: population survey", *Medical Journal of Australia* 178, 437-441.

Moussavi, et al. 2007. "Depression, chronic diseases, and decrements in health: results from the World Health Surveys", *The Lancet*, 370, 851-858.