

Depression after brain injury

Depression after brain injury is common. There are many different treatments for depression. People do get better from depression.

Following a brain injury you (and your family) may experience a wide range of emotional reactions and major life changes. The most common reaction is a depressed mood. Feelings of sadness, grief and despair are a normal reaction to the loss of lifestyle and relationships that may occur. These feelings usually get better over time as you adjust to the injury and the changes that come with it.

Sometimes, brain injury can lead to a loss of energy, and problems with thinking and initiative. These symptoms are like depression and it may be hard to tell the difference between depression and the brain injury symptoms.

In some cases, brain injury can cause depression by changing the balance of chemicals in your brain that are important for maintaining normal mood. This kind of depression can lead to feelings of gloom, general tiredness, hopelessness and poor motivation, which might affect your ability to participate in rehabilitation and other activities. Your sleeping patterns, appetite and thinking ability could also change from depression.

Who gets depressed?

1 in 15 people in the community may become depressed at some time in their lives and one in four people report significant depression after a brain injury. Depression is common after brain injury and identifying the symptoms is important because it can be easily treated. If you have had depression before your brain injury, or someone in your family has had depression or anxiety in the past, you might be more likely to become depressed after a brain injury.

What steps should you take if you think you are depressed?

Step 1. Acknowledge how you feel

Step 2. You will find that the earlier you seek help, the quicker you can get better.

How can you get help?

Talk to your **icare lifetime care** coordinator or case manager about how you (and your family) are feeling. They may ask you to fill in some forms to assess your depression. They'll speak with you about a referral to a brain injury professional who can talk to you about the best way to help you with the depression.

What can you do to help manage your depression?

Depression is made worse by alcohol, drugs and not maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Many people take alcohol or drugs to 'treat' their depression but it may only get worse.

You can help manage your depression by:

- avoiding drugs and alcohol
- eating healthy food and exercising
- getting good quality sleep at night
- talking to your doctor if pain is affecting your sleep
- spending time with friends
- doing at least one thing a day you enjoy.

What can friends and family do to help?

Depression after brain injury is common and the person with the depression needs help and support so that they can seek treatment. Family members may recognise depression before the person with the brain injury does. It's important to encourage and support a depressed person. Criticism or telling the person to 'stop feeling depressed' doesn't work.

What are the treatment options for depression?

There are treatment options for depression and people do get better. It is commonly treated in one of two ways, or often a combination of both. The options are discussed below.

Talking therapy

The person to see for this type of treatment is a psychologist. If, after talking to your case manager or coordinator, you decide this is the best treatment option for you, they can help arrange for you to see someone who knows about depression after brain injury.

Medication

Doctors can prescribe antidepressants for depression. Your brain injury specialist or a specialist psychiatrist can help you decide which medication will work best for you.

What are antidepressants?

Medication is not for everyone, but if your doctor suggests antidepressants you shouldn't be worried. Modern antidepressants work by adjusting the mood chemicals in your brain.

There are many different types of antidepressants and there is usually a medication that will be right for you. Antidepressants are taken on a daily basis. Some antidepressants can decrease pain and help with sleep.

Antidepressants are not addictive and most people only need to take them for a short time. Medication will not stop you being able to engage in your rehabilitation, drive a car or go to work or school. No one can tell if you take the medication, so you won't need to tell people unless you want to.

Where can I get more information?

General information about mental health problems can be found at:

- your GP or psychologist
- your brain injury unit
- your local community health centre
- beyondblue at www.beyondblue.org.au
- SANE Australia at www.sane.org