

Do you feel sad, tearful, can't seem to enjoy yourself...?

What is Depression?

Depression is a mood state linked to changes in feelings and in a person's body. People have strong feelings of sadness, guilt or low self-worth. They can also lose interest or pleasure in activities that they usually enjoy. Bodily signs of depression include problems with sleep or appetite, low energy, poor concentration and sometimes agitation or restlessness.

How do I know if my mood is low?

- Experiencing a loss of pleasure in things that you usually enjoy.
- Feeling sad, empty or hopeless.
- Having trouble getting through each day.
- Feeling worthless, lacking self-esteem and unable to see anything good in yourself.
- Feelings of guilt.
- Sleep too much or not being able to sleep.
- Eat or drink too much or not having any appetite.
- Not able to get started or not being to finish tasks once you start.
- Feel tired and fatigued.
- Do not want to live anymore.
- Often think of dying.
- Feel like being in a big black hole.
- Feeling irritable or short tempered.
- Not being able to feel happy about anything.
- Not able to see or plan a future.
- Have difficulty concentrating or focusing.

If symptoms persist for longer than two weeks, consult your health professional for a formal assessment of mood.

'Mary's' Story

'Mary' is a 70-year-old grandmother with a Glioblastoma (high grade tumour). She usually displays a bubbly and positive personality. Her family have become increasingly worried about her mental state since her recent diagnosis. 'Mary' is flat in her emotional reactions, and is making negative comments to family members such as "what is the point" and "just leave me alone to die". 'Mary' is physically well enough to carry on her activities of daily living but she refuses to get out of bed and get dressed each day. She appears to have given up.

Strategies

For the person with a brain tumour

- Distraction such as listening to music or watching television.
- Light exercise such as walking.
- Talking to someone, seek out peer support or join a group.
- Do activities that you enjoy or help you to stay positive.
- Keeping busy such as working on a project.
- Keep in touch with other people.
- Set short-term plans and act on them.
- Learn positive self-talk.
- Try relaxation or mindfulness exercises (see Resource Sheet).
- Speak to a counsellor.
- Medication may be an important help if your mood does not seem to get better.

KEY FACTS

A survey of people with a brain tumour found that:

- 28% had severe or extremely severe levels of depression.
- 13% had high levels of both anxiety and depression including feelings such as panic and losing all hope.

Strategies for the carer or family member

- Encourage any form of physical activity, such as light exercise or going for walks.
- Seek help from a doctor or psychologist if you feel they are not coping.
- Be there to give them support when they need it.
- Get them involved in activities and social events.
- Listen to them, don't offer meaningless advice.
- Realise that negative thinking is a symptom of depression and will go away with treatment.
- Provide reassurance, try to stay positive but not be excessively optimistic.
- Keep in mind that caregivers and family members can also become depressed. Go seek help for yourself if you need it.



Question to ask your Health Professional

- What is the likely cause of the depression?
- Is it related to the tumour itself?
- Is it related to the treatments given for the tumour or other medications?
- Could the depression be an unrelated medical condition and does this need treatment in itself?
- Do I/we expect the depression to get better or worse over time?
- Are there any medications that can help the problem?
- Can a psychologist help to treat this problem?
- Are there any diet or lifestyle factors that can help with the depression?
- Who else could I/we speak with to assist with the depression?

Links to other Information:

- <http://braininjury.org.au/portal/factsheets/depressionincarersfactsheet429.html>
- <http://braininjury.org.au/portal/factsheets/depressionfactsheet431.html>
- <http://braininjury.org.au/portal/fact-sheets/depression-and-brain-injury---fact-sheet.html>
Resource Sheet – How to Cope with Depression
Resource Sheet – Activity Scheduling