

CARERS AND DEPRESSION



CARING FOR SOMEONE WHO HAS DEPRESSION

Caring for a family member or friend who has depression can be physically demanding and emotionally draining. But taking care of your own health and wellbeing is important in order to cope with the demands of caring.

Everyone feels sad or blue at some time of their life. But when you have depression those feelings are persistent; interfering with daily activities and affecting physical and mental health.

People with depression can experience a wide range of symptoms such as: persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, feeling unable to cope with everyday things, not wanting to go out or go to work, fatigue, irritability, loss of appetite, trouble sleeping and difficulty concentrating. In extreme cases, people may have thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Families and carers should be recognised, respected and supported as partners in providing care to the consumer.¹

The journey towards recovery may be long and difficult and caring for someone with depression might involve a range of supports. This may include: providing emotional support and encouragement, supervising medication, accompanying the person to medical and therapist appointments and assisting with daily activities such as shopping, banking, cooking and cleaning.

While caring can bring many positive rewards, over time it can also have a negative impact on the carer's physical health. It can be exhausting, unpredictable, frustrating and at times heartbreaking.

It is important to know that you are not alone and that help is available.

INFORMATION

It can be frustrating not understanding the symptoms and behaviours of the person you care for. Arming yourself with information can help you (and the person you care for) to feel more in control and confident. For information about depression, visit www.beyondblue.org.au or call them on 1300 224 636

SUPPORT FOR THE PERSON YOU CARE FOR

The mental health system is a complex configuration of many different services, comprised of public and private, government, hospital and community based components. It can be difficult to know where to start, or how to find the organisation that offers the

support and services for the person you care for. For information about when, how and where to access mental health support speak to your family GP or visit www.mindhealthconnect.org.au.

SUPPORT FOR YOU

There are a number of organisations which offer supports and services to help families to manage the impact of mental illness on their lives. The Carer Advisory Line (1800 242 636) is a good place to start. They can give you advice and information about the supports and services to help you.

QUICK TIPS:

When you are caring for someone else you often put your own needs last. These tips are a reminder that your own health and wellbeing is important. Staying strong will help you to better cope with the demands of caring.

- Eat well. A nutritious balanced diet will give you the fuel your body needs to keep on caring.
- Exercise regularly. Physical exercise can relieve tension and reduce stress levels.
- Sleep well. Caring can be exhausting so try and get eight hours sleep every night.
- Share the care. Let family members and friends know that their help and support is welcome.
- Talk it over. With a friend or family member or with a professional counsellor. Join a Carer Support Group and meet other people to share tips and experiences.
- Take a break. Do something that you love ... or do nothing but relax and recharge your batteries.

Contact the Carer Advisory Line for more information 1800 242 636.

1. Cummins, Robert A (2007) The Wellbeing of Australians – Carer Health and Wellbeing. Deakin University, Geelong.

Turn the page for 'Carers who have depression'.

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CARERS WHO HAVE DEPRESSION

While caring for a family member or friend who has a disability or illness can be a rewarding and positive experience, the ongoing stress can lead to depression.

When a caring role continues for many years, or is relentless and demanding, or when the role is physically or emotionally challenging, the prolonged stress can result in depression.

Symptoms may include: persistent sadness, feelings of hopelessness, feeling unable to cope with everyday things, not wanting to go out or go to work, fatigue, irritability, loss of appetite, trouble sleeping and difficulty concentrating.

Most people will feel sad or blue at different times of their life, but if these symptoms are ongoing and begin to interfere with daily activities, it is important to seek medical help.

More than half of Australia's carers (56 per cent) have at least moderate depression ... a fifth of them have severe depression.²

Too often, carers are so busy caring for someone else that they neglect their own needs. But the sooner you seek medical attention, the sooner you can start a treatment plan towards better health. This can then lead to better resilience and capacity to cope with the demands of caring.

GET HELP

Talk to your GP for an assessment of your symptoms. Your GP will be able to confirm a diagnosis and help you to explore the supports and treatments that are available.

Types of treatment may include psychological interventions ('talking' therapies, counselling) and medical intervention (antidepressant drugs).

GET INFORMED

It can be frustrating not understanding the symptoms and treatments. Arming yourself with information will help you feel more in control and confident about the treatments being offered.

For information about depression, visit www.beyondblue.org.au or call 1300 224 636.

For information and resources about mental health services visit www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

SUPPORT FOR YOU AS A CARER

Caring can be difficult at the best of times; it can feel almost impossible if you are experiencing your own health issues.

To help you last the distance, make sure you access all the support that is available to you.

Contact the Carer Advisory Line (1800 242 636) for advice and information about practical, financial and emotional supports that are available to you as a carer.

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2. *ibid.*

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