Life has its ups and downs and everyone has times when they feel low. It’s normal to feel sad when we’ve suffered a loss or disappointment, however, these heavy or gloomy feelings usually pass and we are able to still experience happy times with our friends or family. When these feelings don’t go away it might be time to seek help.

**What is depression?**
Depression is on a spectrum that ranges from mild to severe and is more than a low mood. It is a prolonged and persistent negative mood that can interfere with many aspects of a person’s life that can include feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, excessive guilt and hopelessness. Negative thoughts might also include suicidal ideation or wanting to harm yourself.

**What makes a person more at risk of depression?**
Some people are more vulnerable to depression than others. It may be that they have a history of depression, depression is present in other family members, or they have experienced ongoing significant life stressors. Some things that can increase the risk of developing depression include:

- Ongoing health complaints including disease, illness and chronic pain
- Poor health, including diet and physical exercise
- Interpersonal problems
- Loss of control over our lives e.g. prolonged stress, rising debt, relationship breakup
- Loss of a loved one and grief
- Unrealistic expectations of ourselves
- Perceived failure or major disappointment

- Negative thinking which gradually becomes self-defeating
- Drug and alcohol use
- Inner conflict over spiritual, philosophical or existential beliefs
- Family history of depression or bipolar disorder

Regardless of the causes and contributing factors to depression, effective treatment is available.

**When is depression serious?**
When the symptoms are pervasive, severe and present most of the time and when the things that normally improve your mood are not helping, it might be time to seek help. Under these conditions it becomes difficult to function normally.

At the severe end of the spectrum people tend to experience more marked physical symptoms (changes to sleeping and eating patterns and loss of energy and motivation). It is important to remember that even severe depression is treatable with the right support. When depressive feelings persist for 2 weeks or more and interfere with one’s health and social well-being, then some sort of intervention or professional help is needed.
**Symptoms of depression**

Depression can have a range of symptoms including physical ones. Below is a list of possible symptoms – you do not need to suffer all of these to be experiencing depression. It is important to ensure there is no medical cause of ongoing physical symptoms.

**Emotional**
- Feeling down, unhappy or sad
- Loss of interest in most things, including activities that you have previously enjoyed
- Loss of motivation
- Feeling irritable or easily frustrated
- Feeling less confident, hopeless and/or helpless
- Feeling pessimistic or negative
- Feeling guilty a lot of the time.

**Physical**
- Increase or decrease in the amount of sleep
- Increase or decrease in appetite
- Fatigue, loss of energy
- Weight loss or gain
- Inexplicable aches and pains
- Reduced sex drive
- Loss of interest in and enjoyment of previously pleasurable activities
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Neglecting responsibilities and personal appearance

**Thoughts and perceptions**
- All or nothing / black and white thinking, when one thing bad makes it seem that everything is bad or you think things are good or bad and cannot see them as something in-between
- Self-defeating thoughts (e.g. "I’m a failure", “I’m stupid”)
- Catastrophising, or having the tendency to overestimate the negative parts of a situation
- Personalising, or taking on sole responsibility for unpleasant events
- Negative focus, which is looking only at the negative side or jumping to negative conclusions

**Downward spiral of depression**

Depression can become self-defeating and result in a downward spiral of mood. Negative thinking can lead you to feel down, which in turn makes it more difficult to be actively involved in life.

An effective way to break this spiral is by increasing our involvement in pleasurable activities and opportunities that help us feeling good about life.

**How to regain a positive outlook**

There are many small things you can do to make a difference to how you are feeling. Some examples include:

- Make a weekly list of your positive accomplishments
- Make a weekly schedule of your daily activities – include more pleasurable and social activities
- Find a hobby or two
- Exercise daily and eat healthy foods
- Learn to use self-relaxation techniques whenever you feel tense
- Set realistic short, medium and long-term goals
- Be assertive – learn to say “no”
- Remind yourself that these feelings will pass
- Learn to accept that everyone has different abilities and focus on your unique characteristics and positive accomplishments
- Be organised and focus on building and practicing sound time management skills
- Check in with your emotional self and stay curious (e.g. ask yourself “what am I feeling and what has happened today that has contributed to this?”)

**Where can I get more information of help?**

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide and are in need of immediate support contact ‘000’ or Lifeline on 13 11 14.

If symptoms persist talking with your GP or a counsellor can assist you to find ways to manage your depression.

**University Counselling Service:**

utasm.edu.au/counselling

Free personal counselling (face-to-face, video, phone, instant chat and email) appointments are available with experienced mental health clinicians between 8.30am and 5.00pm weekdays.

Phone: 1800 817 675

Online bookings:

utasm.edu.au/appointments

After Hours Crisis counselling support phone 1300 511 709 or text 0488 884 168

> utasm.edu.au/students