

# DEPRESSION IN PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING



## FACT SHEET 33

This fact sheet was produced in association with  and is endorsed by Deaf Children Australia



People with hearing loss encounter practical and social problems beyond those experienced by people who have their hearing. This extra burden may increase the risk of developing mental health problems.<sup>1</sup>

People who lose their hearing may give up interests and activities and this can impact on psychological well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Hearing loss can have an impact on quality of life and can lead to isolation and depression.<sup>2</sup>

Losing one's hearing later in life may lead to sadness about the loss of hearing and impact on one's mental health and well-being.<sup>3,4</sup>

A survey conducted in 2007<sup>5</sup> found that six in 10 people with hearing loss had displayed some of the symptoms associated with depression. People with hearing loss experienced the following symptoms of depression:

- one in two had displayed increased irritability and frustration
- one in five had trouble sleeping or experienced restlessness
- nearly 20 per cent showed a loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- one in seven was described as being sad, down and miserable most of the time
- one in seven had withdrawn from close family and friends.

***Being diagnosed, treated for and recovering from depression can be difficult for everyone, but it can be even more of a challenge for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.***

## RISK FACTORS FOR DEPRESSION IN PEOPLE WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

Reasons why people who are deaf may feel down, isolated and lonely

- If they think they're not understood by others e.g. their family members, friends or work colleagues don't know how to communicate with them – this could lead to people feeling confused and detached from what is going on around them.
- If they don't know how to express themselves and their feelings – this may be because they can't express themselves in words or the person with whom they wish to communicate is having difficulty communicating e.g. shouting, yelling, negative facial gestures.
- If other people do not understand their communication style or needs e.g. failure of a workplace to provide a staff member with an Auslan interpreter or to acknowledge that a person with hearing loss may need information repeated, presented more visually, or via a note taker.
- If they are trying to communicate in loud and congested areas – this applies particularly to people who experience gradual and subtle hearing loss.

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

The word 'depression' is often thought to mean sadness or a low mood. However, depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness.

While everyone feels sad, irritable, moody or low from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time and often without an obvious reason. People with depression find it hard to function every day and may be reluctant to participate in activities they once enjoyed.

Depression is very common. Around one million Australian adults live with depression each year. On average, one in five people will experience depression in their lifetime.

<sup>1</sup> Kvam MH, Loeb M, Tambs K. Mental health in deaf adults: symptoms of anxiety and depression among hearing and deaf individuals. [Journal Article. Research Support, N.I.H., Extramural. Research Support, Non-U.S. Gov't] *Journal of Deaf Studies & Deaf Education*. 12(1):1-7, 2007 and *Aged Care*, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Werngren-Elgstrom M, Dehlin O, Iwarsson S. Aspects of quality of life in persons with pre-lingual deafness using sign language: subjective wellbeing, ill-health symptoms, depression and insomnia. *Archives of Gerontology & Geriatrics*. 37(1):13-24, 2003 Jul-Aug.

<sup>3</sup> Ishine M, Okumiya K, Matsubayashi K. A close association between hearing impairment and activities of daily living, depression, and quality of life in community-dwelling older people in Japan. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. 55(2):316-7, 2007 Feb.

<sup>4</sup> Chou KL, Chi I. Combined effect of vision and hearing impairment on depression in elderly Chinese. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. 19(9):825-32, 2004 Sep.

<sup>5</sup> Newspoll survey conducted July – August 2007 by telephone among 2401 adults aged 18+ nationally, including 305 who live with someone with hearing loss. Results reported by those who live with someone with hearing loss.

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### DO YOU HAVE DEPRESSION?

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

- felt sad, down or miserable most of the time
- lost interest or pleasure in most of their usual activities AND
- experienced symptoms in **at least three of the following four categories:**

#### 1. Feelings

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

#### 2. Thoughts

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

#### 3. Changes in behaviour

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

#### 4. Physical symptoms

- Tired all the time
- Sick and run down
- Slowness of movement
- Slowness of thinking
- Headaches and muscle/stomach pains
- Sleep problems
- Change in eating habits – poor appetite/weight loss or constantly hungry

### TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION

Depression is a treatable illness and with the right treatment, most people recover. There are many types of treatment available.

#### Psychological treatment

Psychological treatment can help a person recover and help prevent the illness returning.

- **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)**

Often, people with depression see situations negatively. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy helps people learn to identify and change negative ways of thinking. CBT is a structured program which recognises that the way people think affects the way they feel.

- **Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)**

The way we get along with others is important to how we feel. Interpersonal Therapy helps people find new ways to improve relationships in order to begin feeling better.

#### Medication

If a person is only mildly or moderately depressed, psychological treatment alone may be effective. However, if depression is severe or persists, medication is often needed.

Talk to a doctor about how antidepressants work and ask about any side-effects. Antidepressant medication can take seven to 21 days to work effectively and should not be started or stopped without medical advice.



## HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF UNDERSTOOD WHEN SEEKING HELP FOR DEPRESSION

Talking about depression can be challenging. It can be even more difficult when there are communication barriers to overcome. This can lead to depression being undetected, untreated or misdiagnosed.

- When you make the appointment it is important to let the health professional know that:
  - o you are deaf or have hearing loss
  - o an accredited Auslan interpreter can be accessed free for private medical appointments through the National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service (**NABS**) by calling 1800 24 69 45 or 1800 24 69 48 (**TTY**) or emailing at [bookings@nabs.org.au](mailto:bookings@nabs.org.au) or through the website at [www.nabs.org.au](http://www.nabs.org.au)
  - o you may need a longer consultation so that you don't feel pressured or rushed to explain your communication requirements along with your symptoms.
- If you are using an Auslan interpreter, ask the health professional to talk to you directly, not the interpreter.
- If you don't need an Auslan interpreter, you may want to arrange for someone who can help with communication to attend the appointment with you e.g. a note taker.

It may be useful to ask the health professional to assist you in the consultation by:

- o speaking clearly and repeating information you don't understand
- o facing you so you can see each other clearly
- o reducing any unnecessary background noise
- o making sure the room is well-lit and that he/she is not sitting in front of a window so you can see facial expressions and lip reading more easily
- o writing down important information for you to take away.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

**A doctor** who is a General Practitioner (GP) is a good place to start to get help. It's advisable to see a GP you've seen before as he/she will have your medical history. If your GP is unavailable, you may want to see another GP who works in the same practice.

If you don't have a regular GP or clinic, you can find a GP on the *beyondblue* website [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) by clicking on Find a Doctor or other Mental Health Practitioner.

**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 such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) or Interpersonal Therapy (IPT).

**Psychologists, Social Workers and Occupational Therapists** in mental health are trained to provide non-medical (psychological) treatment for depression and related disorders. A Medicare rebate can be claimed for psychological treatments when a GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician refers the person to a registered psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist in mental health. This rebate can be claimed for part of the cost for up to 12 individual consultations (more in exceptional circumstances) and 12 group sessions in a calendar year. To find a list of health professionals who provide psychological treatment for which a Medicare rebate can be claimed, go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) and click on Find a Doctor or other Mental Health Practitioner.

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## MORE INFORMATION

### **beyondblue: the national depression initiative**

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and where to get help including a list of doctors and psychologists

### **beyondblue info line**

Information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders, available treatments and referral only (local call cost from landline)

- Callers who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment can call through the National Relay Service (NRS)  
**TTY:** Ph 133 677 and ask for 1300 22 463
- **Voice-only** (speak & listen) users: phone 1300 555 727 and ask for 1300 22 4636
- **Internet Relay:** connect to [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au) and ask for 1300 22 4636

### **Youthbeyondblue**

[www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

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

### **Australian Federation of Deaf Societies (AFDS)**

Contact the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies for information about services available in your state/territory.

Macquarie House, Level 4, 169 Macquarie St. Parramatta NSW 2150

**Email** [afds@deafsociety.com](mailto:afds@deafsociety.com) **Ph** (02) 8833 3667

**Fax** (02) 9893 8333 **TTY** (02) 9893 8858

### **Suicide Call Back Service**

- **Voice:** 1300 659 467

Free telephone support for those at risk of suicide, their carers and those bereaved by suicide

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PO Box 6100, Hawthorn West VIC 3122

T: (03) 9810 6100

*beyondblue* info line 1300 22 4636

F: (03) 9810 6111

E: [bb@beyondblue.org.au](mailto:bb@beyondblue.org.au)

W: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### **National Auslan Booking Service (NABS)**

[www.nabs.org.au](http://www.nabs.org.au)

NABS provides interpreters to deaf and hard of hearing people who use sign language and would like an interpreter for private medical appointments with GPs, psychologists, mental health workers and psychiatrists. This service is free to sign language users and medical practitioners.

- **Voice:** 1800 24 69 45
- **TTY:** 1800 24 69 48

### **Mensline Australia**

[www.menslineaus.org.au](http://www.menslineaus.org.au)

24 hour support for men with family and relationship problems especially associated with family breakdown or separation – This service provides anonymous telephone support, information and referral (local call).

- **Voice:** 1300 789 978
- **TTY:** Call the National Relay Service on 133 677 and dial/quote 1300 78 99 78

### **Lifeline**

- **Voice:** 13 11 14

24 hour counselling, information and referral (local call)

Call the National Relay Service at 133 677 and then dial/quote 13 11 14

### **Able Australia**

[www.ableaustralia.org.au](http://www.ableaustralia.org.au)

Information, support, case management, community education and recreational services for people with dual sensory loss or deafblindness

- **Voice:** 1300 225 369
- **TTY:** (03) 9882 6786

### **Relationships Australia**

- **Voice:** 1300 364 277

Relationship counselling and support