

BLOKES AND THE BLUES



Times can get pretty tough for even the most hardened of men, but the good news is you don't have to go through it alone. Listen up, guys – this one's for you.

BY SIMONE MCCLENAUGHAN, ILLUSTRATOR BEN JELFS

First, you need to know three things: 1. You are not crazy; 2. You are not weak; 3. Depression is actually more common than you think.

We're talking about male depression. And it's a serious issue – it's not one to be fobbed off, brushed off, or sucked up. Why? Because one in eight men will experience depression during his lifetime. Approximately 15 per cent of people over the age of 65 experience depression. And six Australians commit suicide each day, often due to mental health concerns like depression. Five of these people are men. In fact, men aged 80 and over account for the highest suicide rates in the country.

So now that we've got your attention, let's really talk about depression and blokes.

What is depression and why have I got it?

Depression is a health condition – it is not a reflection of you or your character.

"Depression is an illness that needs to be managed – just like diabetes," states Dr Elizabeth Celi, a psychologist specialising in men's mental health and author of *Regular Joe vs. Mr. Invincible – The Battle For The True Man.* »

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“Depression really is a common experience and no-one has an exact answer of exactly why it happens,” says Dr Brian Graetz, deputy CEO of beyondblue. “But, our biology, psychology and life events are major contributors to depression.”

In general, depression is when you are feeling persistently down.

Some common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Not doing the things you love or going out and avoiding family and friends
- Relying on alcohol and sedatives
- Feeling overwhelmed, guilty, irritable, frustrated, unhappy, disappointed, miserable and sad
- Lacking in confidence and concentration
- Being indecisive
- Having frequent negative thoughts
- Feeling tired all the time
- Being sick and run down
- Having headaches, muscle pains, a churning stomach
- Having sleep problems
- A change in appetite, such as eating more or less and weight loss or gain

Key times in life when depression might spark up are during times of change and transition such as ageing or illness. “Some people may experience depression throughout their life for various reasons including biological factors, whereas for many it comes up during times of significant change,” says Dr Celi.

When you age, there is an increased risk of many chronic health conditions, which can lead to feelings of depression and anxiety. There are also a number of significant changes during this period of your life such as retirement, moving house and downsizing, and possible loss of spouses and friends due to death.

All of these things can create a sense of loss, which increases the chance of developing depression.

How do I get treatment and support?

There are two types of treatment and support for men. In some cases, medication can be used, in others, therapy (such as seeing a psychologist, counsellor or psychiatrist), or a combination of both. Life is much better with support and treatment.

“From our experience, the biggest breakthroughs come when people say, ‘I need help’ to a friend or family member. This opening up lifts a huge burden, and then makes it easier to access professional help,” says Dr Graetz. “It’s also easier to get help when you first start to notice the signs and symptoms of depression, rather than waiting until the depression is severe as then being willing to ask for help becomes extremely hard.”

Dr Celi highlights that getting help with your mental health skills is no different to getting a tune up at the mechanic or getting a sports coach to help you out with a skill you’re having trouble with. You wouldn’t avoid getting your car tuned or improving your right hook.

When Dr Celi works with her clients with depression, she helps them to develop a healthy emotional awareness and emotional literacy so they can recognise, acknowledge, describe and label their emotions. Then she helps men to learn skills to deal with their thought processes and negative emotions, so when a situation comes up that sparks skewed thinking or difficult emotions, they have the tool kit to productively deal with it. »

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The important thing is to take the first steps to get help. The longer you put off seeking assistance, the more difficult he depression will be to manage.

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How do I deal with the stigma?
Often men have grown up in an environment where seeking help for mental health issues or their emotions is a sign of weakness and that they are crazy.

“Men fear that other people won’t accept or understand that they have depression,” reveals Dr Graetz. “But if they just tell others, they’ll tend to find that people will want to help and support them. Men should also realise that everyone will have problems of some type during their life and will need to talk about them.”

Dr Celi agrees. “Depression requires emotions to be dealt with, which historically has been socially unacceptable for men. But this is not the case today,” explains Dr Celi. “Your emotions matter. Men have emotions just like everyone else. And that’s perfectly normal.”

“The more men who come forward and are willing to talk about their feelings, the more the stigma associated with mental health will reduce,” says Dr Graetz. ••

A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Probus can be a fantastic avenue to find a new lease of life. Clubs are non-political, non-sectarian and non-fundraising. Its purpose is to advance intellectual interests among seniors and to provide regular opportunities to progress healthy minds and active bodies through social interaction and activities. Probus is a great way to enjoy the fellowship of newfound friends.

📍 Visit the club locator on the Probus website to find a club near you: probussouthpacific.org

HELP IS HERE

Don't suffer in silence. Help is always available. You can visit your GP who will refer you to a psychologist if necessary, visit a range of mental health websites or anonymously call a support line for help.

BEYONDBLUE provides information and support for people with mental health concerns including depression, anxiety, grief and loss.

W: beyondblue.org.au
T: 1300 224 636

MAN THERAPY aims to help, educate and provide support to men experiencing mental health concerns.

W: mantherapy.org.au
T: 1300 222 638

MEN'S LINE AUSTRALIA is a professional telephone and online support and information service for Australian men, and includes online or video counselling.

W: mensline.org.au
T: 1300 789 978

LIFELINE offers online and telephone support for people experiencing depression and having suicidal thoughts.

W: lifeline.org.au
T: 131 114

MINDHEALTHCONNECT provides practical information on mental health issues, online courses and helplines.

W: mindhealthconnect.org.au
T: 1800 022 222

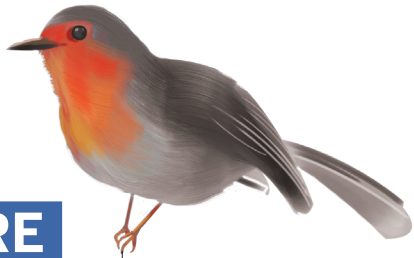
MINDSPOT is an online and telephone clinic providing free assessment and treatment services for Australian adults with anxiety or depression.

W: mindspot.org.au
T: 1800 614 434

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MEN'S SHEDS

You might have a shed in your backyard that's your haven – a place where you can tinker and create. Men's Sheds are places where you can keep busy working on projects as well as connect with other men. They provide a supportive environment for you to improve your wellbeing, and talk about your feelings or what you're going through (if you feel like it – it isn't essential). Discover more about Men's Sheds and where your local one is at mensshed.org.



LIKE A REAL MAN
THE WORK BEHIND MEN'S SHEDS

Probus member Aussie Osborne helped start a Men's Shed in Western Australia.

“Six years ago, I was in the process of retiring and looking forward to putting something back into the community, so I decided to join Men's Sheds. Our social director Eddie Holmes of the Rossmoyne Mens Probus Club put a notice out to all members to set up a Men's Shed in the area. A total of 10 members put their names down.

“As a result, a visit was arranged to the Fremantle Men's Shed to understand what a Men's Shed was all about and we learned a lot. I should point out that only five members actually turned up.

“We then called a public meeting at the Canning Town Hall, which attracted some 50 people. This included a member of the local Baptist Church in Shelley, who offered us a store room to use. The material was cleaned out and we moved in with one table and four plastic chairs which I found.

“An article was placed in the local newspaper and donations of tools and old machinery came out of the woodwork. We were off and running – we made our own work benches and shelves on the walls. Now at the shed, we make toys for children and donate them to the church for schools in Asia. We also do repairs of furniture for our local retirement villages and the church. Way, we stay out of the church's way and they stay out of ours, but we do work well together.

“I'm now a proxy delegate for Men's Sheds Australia and we now have 40 members in our shed. I have saved two members from topping themselves, so we are doing our bit. Women openly talk about their problems, whereas men don't. In the sheds, they can talk to each other and it makes all the difference in the world. The most important thing is the experience of learning something from someone in the shed who knows about something that you don't know. It's a two-way street.

“There's a guy called James at one of the sheds in WA. He can only use one hand, but he is just an ordinary bloke. So if he swears at us, we swear right back at him. When he joined, he could barely rub down a piece of timber, and over the years, I've gradually got him onto a press mill, a sander, and he's done some painting. He's just a totally different bloke now.

“Men's Sheds are just about blokes talking to each other and asking, 'How are you going mate? How are you feeling?' And they'll come out telling you all sorts of things. It's all man-to-man, it doesn't leave the room or go anywhere else. I've seen it myself.

“The other beauty is we don't discriminate. No matter who you are, whether you're black or blue – it doesn't matter. From 18 through to 100 years old, you can join.”