



Sir Brian Bell  
Foundation  
Supporting Health and Education in PNG

– LET'S TALK –



# WORLD HEALTH DAY

## APRIL 7th, 2017



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The Sir Brian Bell Foundation is proud to support health and education initiatives in Papua New Guinea. Stay up to date with all the latest news from the Foundation and the programs and individuals it supports via our Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/sirbrianbellfoundation](http://www.facebook.com/sirbrianbellfoundation)

### WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. According to the latest estimates from WHO, more than 300 million people are now living with depression, an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015. Lack of support for people with mental disorders, coupled with a fear of stigma, prevent many from accessing the treatment they need to live healthy, productive lives. The theme of this year's World Health Day is "Depression: let's talk", the goal of the campaign is that more people with depression, everywhere in the world, both seek and get help. WHO has identified strong links between depression and other noncommunicable disorders and diseases. Depression increases the risk of substance use disorders and diseases such as diabetes and heart disease; the opposite is also true, meaning that people with these other conditions have a higher risk of depression. Depression affects people of all ages, from all walks of life, in all countries. It causes mental anguish and impacts on people's ability to carry out even the simplest everyday tasks, with sometimes devastating consequences for relationships with family and friends and the ability to earn a living. At worst, depression can lead to suicide, now the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year olds. Yet, depression can be prevented and treated. A better understanding of what depression is, and how it can be prevented and treated, will help reduce the stigma associated with the condition, and lead to more people seeking help.

### WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a serious condition that has an impact on both physical and mental health. While we may all feel sad, moody or down from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason. Depression can affect a person's thoughts, behaviour, and feelings and can make it difficult to manage day to day life. While the exact cause of depression isn't known, some things can be linked to its development. Depression usually results from a combination of recent events and other longer-term or personal factors, rather than one immediate issue or event. Research suggests that continuing difficulties such as long-term unemployment, living in an abusive or uncaring relationship, long-term isolation or loneliness or prolonged work stress are more likely to cause depression than recent life stresses. However, recent events such as losing your job or a combination of events can 'trigger' depression if you're already at risk due to personal factors and previous bad experiences. Depression can run in families, and some people will be at an increased genetic risk however this does not necessarily mean you will automatically have depression. Some people may be more at risk for depression because of their personality, particularly those that worry a lot, have low self-esteem, are perfectionists, sensitive to personal criticism, or are self-critical and negative. Drug and alcohol use can both lead to and result from depression and should be immediately addressed with a doctor. Coping with a serious medical illness can also lead to depression either through stress/worry or dealing with long term management and/or chronic pain. It is important to remember that depression is treatable, and help is available. If you or a loved one are experiencing signs of depression, it is important to talk to your doctor.

### SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

If you have been experiencing a feeling of being sad, down or miserable most of the time for more than two weeks or have lost interest in your usual activities or are experiencing a few of the symptoms below it is important to talk to your doctor.

**Behaviour:** withdrawing from family and friends, not doing normally enjoyed activities, unable to concentrate, alcohol or drug use, not completing tasks at work or school, not going out anymore.

**Feelings:** sad, miserable, disappointed, indecisive, unhappy, lacking confidence, frustration, irritable, overwhelmed or feelings of guilt.

**Thoughts:** "people would be better off without me," "it's my fault," "life's not worth living," "I'm a failure," "I'm worthless," "nothing good ever happens to me."

**Physical:** feeling tired all the time, run down or sick, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite or weight, headaches or muscle aches.

*Please note: everyone experiences some of the symptoms above from time to time, it may not mean your depressed. Equally those experiencing depression may not experience all of the symptoms above. Talk to your doctor.*



### TYPES OF DEPRESSION

**Beyond Blue Australia:** There are different types of depressive disorders. Symptoms can range from relatively minor (but still disabling) through to very severe, so it's helpful to be aware of the range of conditions and their specific symptoms.

**Major depression:** sometimes called major depressive disorder, clinical depression, unipolar depression or simply 'depression' involves low mood and/or loss of interest and pleasure in usual activities, as well as other symptoms. These symptoms are experienced most days and last for at least two weeks and can interfere with all areas of a person's life, including work and social relationships. Depression can be described as mild, moderate or severe; melancholic or psychotic.

**Melancholia:** a severe form of depression where many of the physical symptoms of depression are present. One of the major changes is that the person starts to move more slowly and are more likely to have a depressed mood that is characterised by complete loss of pleasure in everything, or almost everything.

**Psychotic depression:** Sometimes people with a depressive disorder can lose touch with reality and experience psychosis involving hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that aren't there) or delusions (false beliefs that aren't shared by others), such as believing they are bad or evil, or that they're being watched or followed. They can also be paranoid, feeling as though everyone is against them or that they are the cause of illness or bad events occurring around them.

**Antenatal and postnatal depression:** Women are at an increased risk of depression during pregnancy (antenatal or prenatal period) and in the year following childbirth (postnatal period). The causes of depression at this time can be complex and are often the result of a combination of factors. In the days immediately following birth, many women experience the 'baby blues' which is a common condition related to hormonal changes and affects up to 80 per cent of women. The 'baby blues', or general stress adjusting to pregnancy and/or a new baby, are common experiences, but are different from depression. Talk to your doctor.

**Bipolar disorder:** Bipolar disorder used to be known as 'manic depression' because the person experiences periods of depression and periods of mania, with periods of normal mood in between. Mania is like the opposite of depression and can vary in intensity – symptoms include feeling great, having lots of energy, having racing thoughts and little need for sleep, talking quickly, having difficulty focusing on tasks, and feeling frustrated and irritable. This is not just a fleeting experience. Bipolar disorder seems to be most closely linked to family history. Stress and conflict can trigger episodes for people with this condition and it's not uncommon for bipolar disorder to be misdiagnosed as depression, alcohol or drug abuse, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or schizophrenia. Diagnosis depends on the person having had an episode of mania and, unless observed, this can be hard to pick. It is not uncommon for people to go for years before receiving an accurate diagnosis of bipolar disorder. If you're experiencing highs and lows, it's helpful to make this clear to your doctor.

**Cyclothymic disorder:** Cyclothymic disorder is often described as a milder form of bipolar disorder. The person experiences chronic fluctuating moods over at least two years, involving periods of hypomania (a mild to moderate level of mania) and periods of depressive symptoms, with very short periods (no more than two months) of normality between. The duration of the symptoms are shorter, less severe and not as regular, and therefore don't fit the criteria of bipolar disorder or major depression.

**Dysthymic disorder:** The symptoms of dysthymia are similar to those of major depression but are less severe. However, in the case of dysthymia, symptoms last longer. A person has to have this milder depression for more than two years to be diagnosed with dysthymia.

**Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** SAD is a mood disorder that has a seasonal pattern. The cause of the disorder is unclear, but it's thought to be related to the variation in light exposure in different seasons. It's characterised by mood disturbances (either periods of depression or mania) that begin and end in a particular season. Depression which starts in winter and subsides when the season ends is the most common. It's usually diagnosed after the person has had the same symptoms during winter for a couple of years. People with SAD depression are more likely to experience a lack of energy, sleep too much, overeat, gain weight and crave for carbohydrates.

### TREATMENT FOR DEPRESSION

Depression should never be ignored. If you think you may be suffering from depression, it's crucial to talk to your doctor. While there is no proven way to treat depression, there is a range of effective treatments available to assist you. While different treatments work for different people it's important to work with your doctor to find the right approach for you. If you're experiencing moderate to severe depression, your doctor may prescribe antidepressant medication, along with psychological treatments. Antidepressants are sometimes prescribed when other treatments have not been successful or when psychological treatments aren't possible due to the severity of the condition or a lack of access to treatment. People with more severe forms of depression such as bipolar disorder and psychosis will usually need to be treated with medication which may include a combination of mood stabilizers, anti-psychotic drugs, and antidepressants. Only take antidepressant medication exactly as prescribed. Don't stop taking your medication without first consulting your doctor. The length of time medication may need to be taken for will depend on how the individual responds to treatment and the severity of their condition.

### DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE RISK

Depression carries a high risk for suicide, while this is not the case for everyone with depression, it is important to take any suicidal talk or behaviour seriously and learn to recognize the warning signs. Warning Signs of Suicide can include a sense of hopelessness or no hope for the future, a negative view of one's self, aggressiveness and irritability, isolation or feeling alone, drastic changes in mood and behavior, talking about death, self-harming behaviours engaging in 'risky' behaviours, giving things away, substance abuse, feeling like a burden to others or making suicide threats.

*Please note: Depression is treatable, if you or a loved one are experiencing signs of depression talk to your doctor. If you or someone you know is experiencing thoughts of suicide head straight to your nearest emergency department.*

