

How to ask R U OK?

The Health Column

3 Sep
2014

Next week is R U OK? Day – a national day of action held on the second Thursday of every September – dedicated to reminding people to regularly check in with family and friends.

The R U OK? Foundation aims to build the ability of family members, friends, colleagues, teammates, students and community leaders to engage in regular, meaningful conversations with anyone who may be struggling with life. R U OK? Day inspires us to have conversations that count, by talking to our family, friends and community, especially if we sense they may be struggling.



The need for this national day of action is highlighted by the following facts and figures:

- On average, more than 2,300 Australians commit suicide each year.
- An estimated 65,000 people attempt suicide each year.
- Suicide is the biggest killer of Australians aged 15 to 44 years.

Depression is an underlying cause of suicide, and one which can usually be treated. We all sometimes feel sad, moody or low. However, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason. Experiencing some of these symptoms may not necessarily mean a person is experiencing depression. Equally, not every person who is experiencing depression will have all symptoms.

According to *beyondblue*, a person may be experiencing depression if, for more than two weeks, he or she has felt sad, down or miserable most of the time or has lost interest or pleasure in usual activities, and has also experienced several signs and symptoms across at least three categories.

Behavioural symptoms include not going out anymore, an inability to concentrate, not getting things done at work/school, withdrawing from close family and friends, and relying on alcohol and sedatives.

A person suffering depression may also notice a change in their feelings. They may feel overwhelmed, guilty, irritable, frustrated and lacking in confidence. Other signs and symptoms which may manifest in feelings include being unhappy, indecisive, disappointed, miserable and sad.

A person suffering from depression may also have negative thoughts about themselves. Commonly identified ones by *beyondblue* include:

- 'I'm a failure.'
- 'It's my fault.'
- 'Nothing good ever happens to me.'
- 'I'm worthless.'
- 'Life's not worth living.'
- 'People would be better off without me.'

Physically, some warning signs and symptoms are being tired all the time, being sick and run down, having headaches and muscle pains, and experiencing sleep problems. Sufferers may also notice a loss or change of appetite, and significant weight loss or weight gain.

If you suspect you, or someone you know, may have depression, there is a quick, easy and confidential checklist you can complete to give you more insight. You can find this checklist on the *beyondblue* website. The checklist will not provide a diagnosis, for which you need to see a health professional.

Successful treatment usually involves more than one form of therapy – general practitioners, pharmacists, psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors may all be involved in a patient-centred and collaborative mental health care team. Medicine can also be very helpful with treatment success.

Importantly, depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness that can have a significant impact on both physical and mental health.

It may come as a surprise that depression is quite common in the community. While statistics vary, there is general acceptance that approximately one in five people will experience depression at some time in their adult life.

There are different forms of depression with different signs and symptoms – and a number of different treatments. Many of these are explained on the *Depression Self Care Fact Card*, which is available from pharmacies throughout Australia providing the Self Care health information. The *Relaxation Techniques Fact Card* is also useful.

For the nearest Self Care pharmacy location phone the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia on 1300 369 772, or go to www.psa.org.au 'Supporting practice' then 'Self Care', and then 'Find a Self Care pharmacy'.