

Asking R U OK?

The Health Column

Sep
2015

This week, on 10 September we celebrate R U OK? Day, a national day of action held on the second Thursday of every September which is dedicated to reminding people to regularly check in with family and friends.

Developed by the R U OK? Foundation, the day urges us all to ask family, friends and colleagues who may be struggling with life 'Are you ok?'.

The R U OK? Foundation was founded by advertising executive Gavin Larkin in 2009 and aspires to build the capacity of family members, friends, colleagues, teammates, students and community leaders to have regular, meaningful conversations with anyone who might be struggling with life.



The facts and figures highlight the need for such action:

- 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 15–44 years.

Depression is an underlying cause and one which can be treated in most cases. While we all feel sad, moody or low 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.

It is important to note that depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness that has an impact on both physical and mental health.

It may come as a surprise to many of us that depression is pretty common in the community anyway.

While statistics on the incidence of depression vary, there is general acceptance that approximately one in five people will experience depression at some time in their adult life.

According to *beyondblue* (at: www.beyondblue.org.au), a person may be depressed 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 of the signs and symptoms across at least three of the four categories (behaviour, feelings, thoughts, and physical) at: www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/depression/signs-and-symptoms. It's important to note that everyone experiences some of these signs and symptoms from time to time and it may not necessarily mean a person is depressed. Equally, not every person who is experiencing depression will have all of these signs and symptoms.

Behavioural signs and symptoms to be aware of include not going out anymore, not getting things done at work/school, withdrawing from close family and friends, and relying on alcohol and sedatives. In addition signs and symptoms may show up as a person not doing usual enjoyable activities and being unable to concentrate.

A person suffering depression may also notice a change in their feelings and 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 and some common ones identified by *beyondblue* may 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 signs and symptoms to watch for 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 of loss or change of appetite and significant weight loss or gain.

If you think that you, or someone you know, may have depression, there is a quick, easy and confidential checklist you can complete to give you more insight. The checklist will not provide a diagnosis – for that you need to see a health professional.

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 and produced by the Pharmaceutical Society (www.psa.org.au). The *Relaxation techniques Self Care Fact card* is also useful. Successful treatment usually involves more than one form of therapy – general practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists and counsellors may all be involved – and medicine can be very helpful.

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'.