

**In this issue...** we take a close look at depression and the link that it has with suicide. Depression is a mental illness that has a significant part to play in suicide ideation and completed suicide, with a large number of people who take their own life having suffered from depression at the time of their death.

Our feature article this week is all about providing information on what is depression, identifying some of the symptoms, and finding out what can be done to help those who are struggling with this illness.

In this issue we also review the book 'Conquering the Beast Within: How I Fought Depression and Won . . . and How You Can, Too' by Cait Irwin as well as tell you about upcoming suicide prevention & bereavement support events.

## What is depression?

Depression is a "whole-body" illness, involving the body, mood, and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself, and the way you think about things.

As depression deepens and takes over the body and mind, the pain of depression often becomes overwhelming. The chemical imbalance and deep despair can lead the brain to try and find ways to end the pain. This is when suicidal thinking begins. Depressive illnesses can distort thinking such that a person can't think clearly or rationally. The illness can cause thoughts of hopelessness and helplessness, which may lead to suicidal thoughts. Research has consistently shown a strong link between suicide and depression, with 90% of the people who die by suicide having an existing mental illness or substance abuse problem at the time of their death ([www.save.org](http://www.save.org)).



## How many people suffer from depression?

At any one time, about 20% of people in Australia will be affected by depression and 6% will be experiencing a major depressive illness. Postnatal depression affects between 10 to 20% of all new mothers to some degree (cited on [www.mindframe-media.com.au](http://www.mindframe-media.com.au). Retrieved March 2010).

**Less than half of those experiencing depression seek professional help ([beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)).**

## What are the symptoms of depression?

Everyone has 'bad days' or goes through 'rough patches'; however people with depression are suffering from a mental illness and cannot just 'get over it' or 'pull themselves together'. Below are some of the symptoms of depression ([www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)):

### Mood

- feeling sad, moody or crap
- feeling hopeless or helpless
- feeling numb or empty
- feeling anxious
- feeling guilty and blaming yourself
- unable to feel good or enjoy things that you do normally.

### Thinking

- being overly self-critical
- believing you can't cope and that things are out of your control
- difficulty making decisions and thinking clearly
- poor concentrating and memory
- thinking about suicide or ending your life.

## Behaviour

- lack of motivation and energy
- crying a lot
- losing interest in activities you usually enjoy
- withdrawing from your friends and family or being overly dependent on them
- increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- losing your temper more than usual.

## Physical

- loss of appetite or over-eating
- changes in sleep patterns - difficulty getting to sleep, waking up in the middle of the night or sleeping for longer
- headaches or stomach aches
- feeling physically sick
- lack of interest in sex.

The causes of depression are complex and researchers are still trying to fully understand how different risk factors work together to create different kinds of depression. It is generally recognised that depression is a result of 'mental or emotional pressure' in conjunction with a vulnerability to depression. According to the Black Dog Institute, the following is a list of potential causal factors:

- Genetics
- Biochemical factors
- Effects of illness
- Ageing brain
- Gender issues
- The role of stress and personality

What are the treatment options for depression?

Successful treatment of depression depends on accurate diagnoses as well as the implementation of appropriate management strategies. These strategies may be physical (e.g. anti-depressive medication) and/or psychological (e.g. clinical counselling/therapy).



## Useful websites

- [http://www.save.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewPage&page\\_id=FD9AFE8-E081-2F43-D4AE62DE644D1B1F](http://www.save.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.viewPage&page_id=FD9AFE8-E081-2F43-D4AE62DE644D1B1F)
- <http://oas.samhsa.gov/2k5/suicide/suicide.pdf>
- <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinformation/mentalhealthproblems/depression/mendepression.aspx>
- [http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=89](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=89)
- <http://www.depressioncell.com/article.asp?articleid=52308&Types-of-depression>
- <http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/depression>
- [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)



## Book Review

**"Conquering the Beast Within: How I Fought Depression and Won . . . and How You Can, Too"** by Cait Irwin is a journal depicting her own personal account of her battle with depression as a young teen. Using her own illustrations, thoughts and feelings to describe her journey from despair and suicide ideation to eventual hope and recovery, it is a resource that both youth and adults can relate to. In her own raw and sometimes primitive way, the author encourages others to fight the 'beast' everyday until the battle over depression is won. The book also includes messages of hope and support from Cait's family – sharing their own personal story of what it is like to live with someone who suffers depression and what they discovered was helpful during that difficult time.

This book is strongly recommended for adults and children alike as it speaks to the heart of issue and gives the reader a very clear and positive message; 'NEVER GIVE UP'!

## Key Upcoming Events

For information on these and other upcoming events please visit <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/Events.html>.

- **Reconnexion National Anxiety & Depression Conference**

(6 Apr - 7 Apr)

The Puzzle of Wellbeing: an integrated approach to psychological health

- **Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Service Delivery**

(12 Apr 2 - 13 Apr)

Working in partnership to improve service delivery and 'Close the Gap'

- **6th International Drugs and Young People Conference: Making the Connections**

(2 May - 4 May)

This conference will explore the impact of drug use on young people and how youth related drug problems can be responded to by various human service fields.

- **RANZCP Faculty of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Australian Association for Infant Mental Health conference**

(12 May - 14 May)

'Growing up solid: Integrating emotional and mental health throughout infancy, childhood and adolescence'

- **The National Indigenous Domestic Violence Conference**

(17 May - 19 May)

- **Australian General Practice Network Mental Health Conference**

24 May 2011 - 25 May 2011

**"Sometimes you might think it is just easier to give up and live with depression or give up and let go of life. I decided to challenge him every day until I won. You have the courage and persistence in your heart to challenge your beast and be a winner"**

~Cait Irwin~

## Training in Suicide Prevention and Bereavement Support

- Would you know what to do?
- Would you know what to say?
- Would you know where to go for help?

Are you interested in finding out more about Information, resources and training for those that support people who are at risk of suicide or lost a loved one to suicide? Hope for Life will help you to develop the skills, confidence and knowledge to respond to these situations.

The Salvation Army Hope For Life Program gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

## Contact Us:

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

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