

## **Depression following Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) Advice for People with ABI, Family Members and Carers**

Depression is a common experience for those with ABI and their family members. There are two main causes of depression in this situation. The first is depression that may be caused by the nature and location of the brain injury, which in turn, affects the person with the injury. The second is depression that develops in reaction to the changes, losses, stress and trauma associated with an ABI. This type of depression can be experienced by the person with the ABI as well as their family members.

Common symptoms of depression are:

1. Low mood and/or loss of interest or pleasure for at least 2 weeks and
2. A number of these symptoms:
  - Tiredness
  - Appetite and weight change
  - Feeling sick and run down
  - Disturbed sleep
  - Feeling overwhelmed
  - Indecisiveness
  - Lack of confidence
  - Irritability
  - Social withdrawal
  - Increased alcohol & drug use
  - Reduced productivity
  - Poor concentration
  - Negative thinking pattern such as feeling hopeless, helpless & worthless
  - Thoughts about suicide

Depression related to an ABI often develops a number of months or even years after the injury is sustained, when the real life implications of the ABI become apparent. For example, when a person realises they are not going to be able to return to work, or when a person has returned home after a long stay in hospital and things do not go well, depression may be experienced. It is important to understand that depression is common at this time, and to seek assistance. One in five people in Australia

experience depression at some time in their lives with or without ABI. The good news is that depression does respond to treatment.

If you or someone you care about is experiencing depression related to ABI it might be helpful to:

- Talk with someone about your concerns and how you are feeling. Some people find that talking with their friends or family about thoughts and feelings is helpful. Other people find they need to consult with a medical professional or a counsellor.
- Talk to your GP or psychiatrist as they can prescribe medications that can be helpful in treating depression. Medication is not always a cure on its own for depression, but it can be used in conjunction with other strategies. If you have an ABI ensure you tell the doctor as medications can affect people differently following ABI.
- If you can, figure out what is contributing to your depression, work towards identifying what you can change and accepting what you are not able to change.
- As much as you are able, stay connected to people who are supportive and around whom you feel comfortable.
- Accept that you feel depressed, that depression is extremely serious and that you can't just choose to 'snap out of it'. Devise a plan for managing your experience of depression. Again, a supportive other or professional may help you in this process.
- Work towards a balanced and healthy lifestyle including recreation, exercise and relaxation.

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This information sheet has been prepared by Melbourne ABI Counselling. Melbourne ABI Counselling provides specialist counselling for people affected by Acquired Brain Injury. If you would like to discuss your situation with a counsellor, please feel free to contact our office on 1300 29 76 09.

For more information sheets on topics related to acquired brain injury please see <http://melbourneabiccounselling.com.au/abi-information-sheets.htm>