

Managing depression, anxiety and isolation

If you're experiencing symptoms of depression and/or anxiety, it's important to get help - the sooner the better

It's common to get the cardiac blues after a heart event or diagnosis. You might feel sad, tearful, angry, irritable, worried or anxious. You have been through a lot and it's normal to experience these feelings and emotions at any point in your journey, even months or years down the track. These feelings often get better with time, and with support from family and friends.

If your feelings and emotions are not improving or are getting worse, it's important that you reach out to someone in your healthcare team for help.

Living with a mental health condition can be challenging for someone with a heart condition due to the added stress and potential impact on their overall health. It can be helpful to speak to people who've been through a similar health journey, which is another good reason to join a cardiac rehab program or support group.

Depression

Depression is different from the temporary 'emotional roller-coaster' response to a stressful event. It is when you feel down or miserable most of the time. It can affect everything, including your normal activities. Think about the past two weeks and tick the answer to these questions that best fits:

How often have you not felt interested in doing the things you usually enjoy?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day

How often have you felt sad, down or like there's no hope?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Several days
- ☐ More than half the days
- ☐ Nearly every day



Scan the QR code or visit myheartmylife.org.au to join MyHeart MyLife - a free support program for people living with heart disease.

If you answered either 'more than half the days' or 'nearly every day' to both these questions, seek help from your doctor or healthcare team as soon as possible.

Your GP is a great person to start a conversation with about your mental health. They might recommend you see a psychologist or start medicines. You can also get more information and support from Beyond Blue (Website: beyondblue.org.au or Phone: 1300 224 636).

Healthy habits can also help improve your mental health as well as your heart health. Aim to:



**Do regular
physical activity**



**Follow a heart-healthy
eating pattern**



Get enough sleep

Anxiety

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. It often comes with strong physical symptoms, like a racing heart, feeling sick, or sweating, trembling or shaking. You might have bad or scary thoughts at the same time. Lots of people with anxiety stay home and avoid others. Unfortunately, this just makes things worse.

The good news is that there are lots of ways to treat anxiety, including medicines and counselling from a psychologist. Your doctor can help you to access these treatments.

Feeling alone

When diagnosed with any condition, it's easy to feel alone. You may feel that the people around you will not understand how your diagnosis affects you physically and mentally. Talk it out. Being connected is important for your heart and your general health. It's like building a team to support you through tough times.

A cardiac rehab program is another great option. As well as all the support and advice from healthcare professionals, you'll get to connect with people who have had similar experiences.

In this video, health psychologist Dr Rosemary Higgins from the Australian Centre for Heart Health talks about the signs and symptoms of anxiety and depression, and what to do if you are experiencing them.



**Watch
video**



Discover a community that cares

The MyHeart MyLife Facebook community is a safe online group moderated by the Heart Foundation where you can share your experience of living with a heart condition and receive support from others who are on a similar journey.



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Reach out to support services

If your emotions are affecting your daily life, it is important that you seek professional assistance for guidance and support. You can do this by reaching out to any of the below support services.

Crisis support

Your doctor

Check in with your general practitioner (GP) and healthcare team to seek help in managing your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Lifeline

Call *Lifeline* (13 11 14) for confidential crisis support via phone, text or online chat.

13 Yarn

Call *13YARN* (13 92 76) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support.

General support

Cardiac Psychology Clinic

The Cardiac Psychology Clinic is available Australia-wide to people diagnosed with a heart condition (fees apply). To access the Cardiac Psychology Clinic, phone 03 9546 0009 or visit hearthealth@neurocentrix.com.au

Medicare Mental Health Centres

You can walk into any centre for free mental health support. Find your nearest centre by visiting www.health.gov.au/our-work/medicare-mental-health-centres or calling 1800 595 212 for further information or to book an appointment. (Please note that this number is not a crisis or emergency service. For urgent support, call Lifeline or Triple Zero (000)). Support through the centres is free for everyone who walks in the door. You do not need an appointment or a GP referral.

WellMob

Access online resources focusing on social, emotional and cultural wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the WellMob website at wellmob.org.au

Beyond Blue

Get mental health support from Beyond Blue by talking or chatting online to a counsellor or by accessing free sessions with a mental health coach. Visit their website at beyondblue.org.au or call them on 1300 22 4636 for more information about mental health treatment and management or to find a mental health practitioner in your area.



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