

Psychological and emotional impact of age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

Being diagnosed with an eye condition like AMD can be very difficult to come to terms with, especially if it is causing vision loss.

This can significantly impact your mental health and may result in you experiencing feelings of anxiety and/or depression.

Our research found that 1 in 6 people living with AMD experience symptoms of depression, and 1 in 5 experience symptoms of anxiety, demonstrating the need for more holistic and comprehensive support and guidance.

What is depression?

Depression is more than a low mood or feeling sad. It involves ongoing feelings of low energy, lack of motivation, and a loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed.

These feelings can sometimes last for weeks, months or in some cases, even longer.

Symptoms of depression

You may be experiencing depression if, for more than two weeks, you:

- Feel sad, down, or miserable most of the time
- Lose interest or pleasure in most usual activities

And you experience symptoms in three or more of the following areas:

- **Behaviours:** withdrawing from family and friends, not completing tasks
- **Feelings:** overwhelmed, guilty, irritable, frustrated, lacking confidence, unhappy
- **Thoughts:** feelings of failure, worthlessness, life not worth living
- **Physical wellbeing:** constantly feeling tired, experience headaches, muscle pain, sleep problems, appetite changes, weight fluctuations.

Depression and anxiety are treatable and effective treatments are available. But early detection is important. Speak to your GP or health professional if you think you might be experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression.



Impact of depression

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, this can sometimes lead to social withdrawal, decreased enjoyment in activities, affect day to day activities and lead to reliance on substances like alcohol.

It can also affect your feelings, thoughts, and physical health, causing a sense of sadness and feelings of low self-worth.

If you feel this way, the best thing to do is seek help. There are lots of avenues for support.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried; it is a serious condition that persists even when there is no clear cause. Unlike common stress, anxiety can make it difficult for a person to manage daily life. In Australia, anxiety is the most common mental health condition, affecting 3 million people. In fact, 1 in 4 Australians will experience anxiety at some point in their lives.



Symptoms of anxiety

Feeling anxious is a normal part of life, but when these feelings start to impact your quality of life and daily functioning, it might indicate an anxiety condition. Symptoms can include feeling worried most of the time, difficulty calming down, inability to control anxious thoughts, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances.

It's important to seek help

Talk to your GP

If you think you might be experiencing symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, it is a good idea to speak to your GP or a mental health professional.

Your GP may ask you some questions that can help them assess if you are experiencing symptoms of anxiety and/or depression.

If you are diagnosed with a mental health condition, your GP can refer you to a mental health professional who can support you.

Your GP can also provide you with a mental health treatment plan.

Ask about a mental health treatment plan

You can ask your GP about a mental health treatment plan to see if you are eligible for one, and it's right for you.

A mental health treatment plan helps outline your mental health treatment options and goals, as well as any support services that may be available to you.

The treatment plan helps you to access up to 10 sessions with a mental health professional every year. It can help cover some of the cost of seeing a specialist mental health professional.

Medicines for treating anxiety and depression

There are also medicines that your GP can prescribe that may help you – if your GP thinks you might benefit from taking them.

Talk to a trusted family member or friend

If you have a trusted family member, carer, or friend, talk to them about how you are feeling, and involve them in discussions about any additional support you need. They can often provide invaluable assistance and understanding throughout your journey toward improved mental health.

Macular Disease Foundation Australia and other low vision organisations also offer support groups and programs where people living with a diagnosis of AMD and/or vision loss can share their experiences. Talking through challenges with people who understand can be very helpful.

To join one of our peer support programs, call our National Helpline on 1800 111 709.

Where to find other support and information resources

There are organisations set up to help you navigate feelings of anxiety and/or depression in a crisis.

Beyond Blue has a 24-hour support line on **1300 22 4636**.

Lifeline's 24-hour crisis support is available by calling **13 11 14**.

Remember you can always reach out to MDFA if you need support. Our National Helpline is available **Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Call 1800 111 709.**

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National Helpline: 1800 111 709 | Email: eyeconnect@mdfoundation.com.au | www.mdfoundation.com.au

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