

# BEATING DEPRESSION

One in six New Zealanders will experience a depressive episode sometime during their life. The good news is that treatment does work and early treatment works even better. Vanessa Caldwell says employers should be aware when an employee is experiencing depression, respond immediately, and help them get assistance.

**DEPRESSION IS ONE OF THE** most common reasons people are absent from work. Ministry of Health statistics indicate that one in six New Zealanders will experience a depressive episode sometime during their life.

Both national and international statistics show depression is among the top three problems that arise in employee assistance programmes. At any one time, there will be people in your organisation who will be experiencing depression.

Depression is an illness that can affect anyone. Becoming familiar with what to look for and what support is available through workplaces and in the community is important in the event you encounter a colleague who is struggling to cope or if you experience symptoms yourself.

Research is now showing that men often experience depression somewhat differently to women. Men may express depression more in terms of an increase in irritability and difficulty managing anger as opposed to feelings of sadness.

A loss of interest in areas that previously held attraction, including work and sex, plus difficulty sleeping are the main areas of concern that men tend to notice most.

Increased alcohol and drug use to 'self medicate' or overworking to escape can make identifying depression more

difficult. This often results in it taking longer to get the right treatment.

There are several medical conditions that can cause depressive symptoms, such as thyroid disorders, adrenal disorders, nutritional deficiencies and medication side effects. Therefore, in the first instance, a visit to a GP is recommended.

The good news is that treatment does work and early treatment works even better. There is a range of effective treatment options available, including medication, which may be offered by your GP.

Once employers are aware that an employee is experiencing depression, they should respond immediately by recommending appropriate support or making it possible for the employee to get assistance. Many organisations have an employee assistance programme, which will offer confidential, short-term treatment. A useful website for free information and assistance is [www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz) or call the 24-hour depression helpline on 0800 111 757.

Some people are put off at the thought of having to see a counsellor face-to-face and share their innermost problems. On-line therapy is one solution for people who do not want to, or are unable to, see a therapist in person.

Instep, a New Zealand em-

### The symptoms of depression

- Listless, miserable, low on energy;
- No longer interested in activities that were once enjoyed;
- Withdrawing from people, for example, avoiding calling people back, working late to avoid going home;
- Becoming overly critical, negative about the world and everything in it;
- Irritable, restless and quick to argue;
- Increased alcohol and/or drug use;
- Unusually slow to complete work; having difficulty concentrating or making decisions, difficulty with short-term memory;
- Change in eating patterns and complaining of difficulty sleeping;
- Complaints of unexplained aches and pains;
- Has developed an "I don't care" attitude.

ployee assistance company has recently launched *Beating the Blues*, a web-based treatment tool that uses cognitive behavioural therapy—which is widely recognized as one of the most effective treatments for depression. It was originally developed in the UK and research has shown the treatment to be just as effective in treating mild and medium forms of depression as traditional therapy.

*Beating the Blues* is an eight-week programme that can be completed in people's own time at their convenience. They will be monitored and supported throughout the programme by a New Zealand psychologist via online and phone support.

The programme is suitable for people experiencing mild to moderate symptoms of depres-

sion and is just as effective if this is the first time they have experienced depression or if they need a refresher. It is likely to appeal to people who:

- Work shifts and find it difficult to get suitable appointments;
- Have accessibility issues in seeing a counsellor;
- Are concerned about how they feel but don't feel unwell enough to see a professional.

Depression is a serious illness and if symptoms are ignored they are likely to get worse, so if you are in any doubt—get it checked out. **ct**

Vanessa Caldwell is a psychologist with Instep Limited. If you are interested in finding out more about this programme visit [www.insteplimited.com](http://www.insteplimited.com)

