



# getting back on track after heart attack or surgery

the ups and downs  
of emotional recovery



cardiacblues

*'A heart event is an emotional experience, not just a physical one.'*

*Having a heart attack or heart surgery can come as a huge shock and can make you realise you're not immortal.*



Many people experience changes in mood and emotions after a cardiac event. Some people feel angry and irritable. Some feel sad and tearful. Some feel moody and 'up and down'.

**Some people worry about whether they will ever get 'back to normal'.**

When you leave hospital you may find yourself on an emotional rollercoaster.

**These feelings are all common and normal, especially in the first few weeks or months.**

## **the cardiac blues** – common emotions



### **SHOCK**

You may find it hard to believe that you have a heart problem.

### **DENIAL**

You might find it hard to accept that this has happened to you.



### **WORRY**

You may worry that you will never get back to your old self. You might be fearful about dying.

### **GUILT**

You may feel guilty about being dependent or blame yourself for what has happened.



### **ANGER**

You may become frustrated and irritated about the changes in your life.

### **SADNESS**

You may feel low and miserable, or your mood might be up and down.



### **RELIEF**

You may feel relieved or thankful that your heart disease has been diagnosed and treated.

## the cardiac blues – other common symptoms

- ◆ **Loss of interest in usual activities**
- ◆ **Withdrawal from others**
- ◆ **Getting tearful and crying easily**
- ◆ **Being 'short tempered'**
- ◆ **Sleep problems**
- ◆ **Change in appetite**
- ◆ **Change in sex drive**
- ◆ **Confusion and forgetfulness**
- ◆ **Inability to concentrate**
- ◆ **Bad dreams and nightmares**
- ◆ **Worry about another heart event**
- ◆ **Thoughts about death**

*A heart event can bring unwelcome changes.*



## the good news is...

*For most people the cardiac blues will go away in the first few months after the cardiac event.*

*Usually within the first few months after a heart event you will start to get back to your usual self and things will begin to get back to normal.*

### **When do these feelings and symptoms become a problem?**

These common emotional reactions can become a problem for some people. If you find that your mood is not getting better over time, you might be experiencing depression.

Ongoing low mood means that you may be depressed.

**If you get 'stuck' in these feelings or worries it is important to get help.**

**If you don't get help, these feelings can last for a long time.**



## Features of depression

Depression is different from the normal emotions that most people experience after a cardiac event.

## Depression includes:

- **Profound feeling of sadness most of the time.**
- **Lack of interest or enjoyment in most activities, including activities you have previously enjoyed.**

These symptoms are profound and do not pass quickly. Some people may have thoughts of suicide or self harm. If you are depressed, you need to talk to your doctor about getting help.

## BASIC FACTS ABOUT DEPRESSION

### Depression in the general community:

- Depression affects one in twenty people at any one time
- One in five people will experience depression at some time over their lifetime

### Depression amongst people who have had a heart event:

- About one in five people go on to develop depression after a cardiac event



## Am I at risk of developing depression?


One in five people go on to develop depression after a heart event.

You are at increased risk of depression if:

- you have had anxiety or depression in the past**
- you have no-one to talk to**
- you have been stressed at work or home**
- you have lost your job**
- you have financial worries**
- a loved one has died recently**
- you have recently divorced or separated**
- you regularly use cigarettes, drugs or alcohol**
- you have diabetes**
- you have other health problems**
- your mood is not getting better**

**If you think you are at risk, make an appointment to talk with your doctor about depression.**





## What can I do to prevent and reduce depression?

- **Be physically active even if you don't feel like it**
- **Spend time with people you like**
- **Attend a cardiac rehabilitation program**
- **Do things that you enjoy**
- **Do things that you are good at**
- **Make time for relaxation**
- **Talk with your doctor about how you feel**
- **Ask for a referral to a psychologist if needed**



## Where can I get help?

Specialised psychological support is available Australia-wide through the Cardiac Counselling Clinic of the Australian Centre for Heart Health.

Contact the Clinic at 03 9326 8544 or [wellbeing@australianhearthealth.org.au](mailto:wellbeing@australianhearthealth.org.au) or register through the website [www.australianhearthealth.org.au](http://www.australianhearthealth.org.au)

For other resources, contact the Heart Foundation Helpline on 13 11 12 or visit [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

**To find out more go to:**  
**[www.australianhearthealth.org.au](http://www.australianhearthealth.org.au)**

