

# Internet of long-term benefit for depression: Study

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Mental health researchers at The Australian National University have found that brief Internet-based interventions for depression are not only immediately effective, but have a significant positive long-term benefit that may be as effective as active psychotherapies.

The yet-to-be-published findings by Professors Helen Christensen and Andrew Mackinnon and Dr Kathy Griffiths at the Centre for Mental Health Research (CMHR) at ANU demonstrate that the Internet can, in some cases, be as effective for the treatment of depression as treatments involving direct human contact.

CMHR is a leader in the development and provision of mental health information and intervention via the Internet and has developed an online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) site, [moodgym.anu.edu.au](http://moodgym.anu.edu.au), and a psychoeducation site, [bluepages.anu.edu.au](http://bluepages.anu.edu.au). These are accessed free of charge and anonymously by hundreds of thousands of users around the world. BluePages provides information about a range of psychological, medical and alternative treatments and recommends those supported by scientific evidence.

The study evaluated the effectiveness of the two websites 12-months on from initial contact. While a number of studies have confirmed the effectiveness of Internet interventions for depression, the ANU study is the first one to look at the longer term effectiveness of online treatment.

Professor Christensen said the study found that improvement in

symptoms among users of MoodGYM and BluePages was maintained at 12 months, and in the case of depression, there was greater improvement over the longer term.

“For people who had higher levels of depression at the outset, we found that BluePages in particular provided greater average benefit after 12 months,” Professor Christensen said.

“We don’t know exactly why the Internet interventions are so effective in the longer term, but it may be that there is a reduction in use of ineffective and potentially damaging treatments. It may also be that the information on the websites really only becomes effective once people have put into place the treatments and practices recommended.

“The findings also suggest that brief interventions may have a lasting positive effect on people struggling with depression - an outcome that may seem counter-intuitive given the lack of human support and low level of human interaction. But we do have evidence in other areas as well that such brief interventions can be very helpful.”

Professor Christensen said that the Internet provided an effective way to reach people struggling with mental health in rural and remote areas, as well as providing easy access to information to the over 60 per cent of people affected by mental health problems who don’t seek or receive any professional help.

Source: Australian National University

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