

What you need to know about

Depression

What is it?

Depression is more than being sad or feeling grief after a loss. Depression is a medical condition, just like diabetes or heart disease. Day after day, depression affects your thoughts, feelings, physical health and behaviours. It affects normal day-to-day activities. For diagnostic purposes, a depressive episode must be experienced at a certain level of severity for a minimum duration of two weeks.

How prevalent is it?

Almost 3 million Canadians have serious depression. It accounts for 30% of all disability recorded at three of Canada's best known companies. Depression affects 10 to 15% of men and 15 to 25% of women.

Who is at risk?

These factors can increase the risk of developing or triggering depression:

- Having relatives with depression
- Being a woman
- Having traumatic experiences as a child
- Having family members who have committed suicide
- Experiencing stressful life events
- Having few friends or other personal relationships
- Recently having given birth (postpartum depression)
- Having a serious illness
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Taking certain medications (consult a doctor)

What are the risk factors/triggers?

It's unknown exactly what causes depression. There are a variety of potential factors:

- Family history and genetics — inherited traits, including psychological vulnerability, and relatives with depression
- Life events, such as a loss of a loved one, financial problems, medical illness or high stress

- Biological factors unique to the individual, as well as hormonal changes due to physical conditions
- Early childhood trauma

What are the symptoms?

- Sad mood
- Preoccupation with past failures or inadequacies
- Loss of self-esteem
- Feelings of uselessness, hopelessness, excessive guilt
- Slowed thinking, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, difficulty in making decisions
- Loss of interest in work, hobbies, people
- Lethargy and fatigue
- Agitation or restlessness
- Changes in weight and appetite — eating too little or too much
- Oversleeping or insomnia
- Decreased sexual drive
- Thoughts of death, dying or suicide

What do I need to tell my doctor?

- Write down any symptoms you've had
- Write down key personal information
- Make a list of all medications you are taking
- Write down questions to ask your doctor
- Take a family member or friend along

Discuss all of your symptoms with your doctor and describe how they are affecting your life (e.g. inability to get out of bed and get to work/school). Your doctor can suggest or provide appropriate therapy. Make sure to discuss all of the available treatments and medications and their benefits and side effects before making any decisions.

What are the treatment options?

The most common forms of treatment for depression are antidepressant medication and psychotherapy. The most effective treatment is generally a combination of both.

Some individuals suffering from depression may need a hospital stay or an outpatient treatment program until symptoms improve.

There are several types of antidepressant medication available, and they are categorized by how they work on the naturally occurring chemicals in your brain that affect your mood. Finding the right medication or medications will likely take trial and error. Patience is required, as some medications need eight weeks or more to take full effect, but don't give up if you don't find the right medication right away.

Complementary treatment, such as peer support groups or other support programs, may be helpful.

Finally, additional treatments such as massage, mindfulness meditation, shiatsu, therapeutic touch, aromatherapy, tai chi, Pilates and yoga can also help to improve wellness.

What are the things I need to do to get well?

- **Stick to your treatment plan.** Don't skip psychotherapy sessions. Even if you're feeling well, continue to take medication as prescribed.
- **Learn about depression.** Empower yourself by learning about your condition.
- **Pay attention to the warning signs.** Find out what triggers your depression. Make a plan so that you know what to do if your symptoms get worse. Contact your doctor or therapist if you notice any changes. Ask friends or family to watch out for warning signs.
- **Get exercise.** Physical activity may help reduce the symptoms of depression. Consider walking, jogging, swimming, gardening, or any other physical activity.
- **Maintain an adequate diet.** The Canada Food Guide is a useful reference in helping you choose how to eat well.
- **Avoid alcohol and illicit drugs.** It may seem like they lessen your problems, but in the long run, they generally worsen symptoms and make the depression harder to treat.
- **Get adequate sleep.** This is especially important. If you're having trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor about what you can do.

Where can I learn more?

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre
sunnybrook.ca/content/?page=bsp-depression

Depression Hurts
depressionhurts.ca

Mind Your Mind
mindyourmind.ca

A| M| A| P| C| E| O
ONTARIO'S PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES



**Mood
Disorders
Association
of
Ontario**

Brought to you by the
Mood Disorders Association of Ontario
1-866-363-MOOD (6663)
www.mooddorders.ca