
Depression: it's more than just feeling blue

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is depression?

The Canadian Mental Health Association describes “depression” as a clinical term used by psychiatrists to describe a period of time when a person feels very sad – to the point of feeling worthless, hopeless and helpless.

It is a serious illness. It can affect all aspects of a person’s life – at home, at work, at school and in society at large. It’s an illness that can go undetected for a long time, and yet it can be treated successfully in many people. If left untreated, depression sometimes worsens and can lead to suicide.

Is there a difference between depression and just feeling down?

Yes. Most people feel sad or down from time to time. But in time these feelings pass and they don’t disrupt everyday life. People who are depressed, however, feel an intense and overwhelming sadness which lasts for long periods of time and eventually prevents them from carrying out and enjoying the normal activities of daily life.

Are there different types of depression?

Yes. They generally fall into the following categories:

- Major depression
- Chronic depression (dysthymia)
- Bipolar depression
- Seasonal depression.

What’s the difference between these types of depression?

People with major depression feel deeply and constantly hopeless and despairing. Their symptoms prevent them from taking part in or enjoying everyday life. This depression can be triggered by a significant, emotional event such as: the death of a loved one; a major life change (like divorce); or discovering that one has a serious illness. Sometimes, however, there is no specific trigger.

Chronic depression is also called dysthymia. It is considered less severe than major depression. The main difference between the two is that people who suffer chronic depression go about their daily lives and seem to function well – but they always feel sad or unhappy.

Bipolar depression is also called bipolar disorder or manic depression. Sufferers swing between high and low moods – they are sometimes very joyful, sometimes very sad. In between these highs and lows, there are usually perfectly normal periods.

People with seasonal affective disorder (SAD) suffer a depression that occurs at the same time every year – usually starting in the fall and lasting until the spring.

Does depression affect women more than men?

Yes. It's estimated that one in four women and one in 10 men will suffer from depression at some time in their lives.

What are the symptoms of depression?

Some symptoms include:

- a change in appetite or weight
- difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- feeling more agitated or slowed down
- feeling worthless
- losing interest in everyday life
- avoiding people
- thinking about suicide
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions.

Is depression hereditary?

People with a family history of depression are more likely to experience it themselves. However, while depression is sometimes hereditary, it can also be triggered by traumatic events.

What should I do if I think I am suffering from depression?

You should talk to your family doctor or another health professional.

What should I do if I think someone close to me is suffering from depression?

Many people don't seek help for depression – often because they don't recognize, or accept, that they are depressed. Get advice from your family doctor or another health professional about how to get help. There are many support groups that can also help.

Can children be depressed?

Yes. Depression often starts in childhood or during teenage years. Depression in children and the elderly is often undetected and can go untreated for some time.

How is depression treated?

Depression is the most treatable mental illness. Most types of depression are treated with drugs and psychotherapy. The support of family and friends is often a critical factor in recovery.

Where can I get more information?

One way to get healthy is to get informed. There are many health information sources available to you. This Fact Sheet is one of them. Here are some others.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources : www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information : www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

(Open during business hours, this service answers general questions about healthcare.)

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

TTY 1-866-797-0007

(Open 24/7, this confidential service uses registered nurses to answer your immediate health questions.)

Some other sources

Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division

416-977-5580

www.ontario.cmha.ca

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

416-535-8501

1-800-463-6273

www.camh.net

You can also talk to your family doctor or other health professional, or contact your local public health unit.