Depression

Information for patients, families and caregivers

Read this booklet to learn:

- what depression is
- what causes it
- the signs or symptoms of depression
- what treatments can help

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What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad or unhappy. **Major** or **clinical** depression is when you feel sad or hopeless for a long time. There are different types of depression and the cause is not always known. This can affect your everyday life. Most people who have major depression need professional help to get better.

Who can become depressed?

Depression is common. It can happen at any age. In Canada, 1 person in 10 will become depressed sometime in their life. It is also possible to become depressed later in life.

What causes it?

There are many reasons why you could become depressed.
Usually, it takes more than just one of these reasons to experience a depression. These reasons include:

- **Biological causes**

  Changes in the levels of certain brain chemicals are often seen in people who are depressed.

- **A history of depression in your family**

  Depression can run in families. If members of your family have been depressed, you have a higher chance of becoming depressed.

- **Life events**

  Certain life events can lead to depression in some people. These events may include:

  - loss of a loved one
  - financial problems
  - relationship problems
  - abuse or trauma
  - other stressful life events
  - a stressful work environment

- **Thought patterns**

  Thinking negative thoughts often or feeling that you are not good enough (low self-esteem) could increase your chance of becoming depressed.

- **Physical illness**

  Not feeling well can cause you to become depressed or increase your chance of becoming depressed. It is important to have your health checked regularly and talk with your health care team about mental health.

- **Medications**

  Some medications can contribute to a depressed mood. If you think that this is happening to you, speak to your health care team.

Important!

Depression:

- is not a sign that you are weak
- is not something that is easy to stop on your own
- can be treated at any age

What are the signs that I might be depressed?

There are many signs or symptoms of depression. A few of the symptoms are listed below. Health care professionals can help you find out if you are depressed. They will ask you questions about these symptoms and how they are affecting your life:

- feeling sad, empty, or hopeless
- loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- weight loss or weight gain
- sleeping too little or sleeping too much
- low energy or feeling tired
- feeling worthless and/or guilty
- difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- thoughts about death or suicide

You should get help if you have been having 5 or more of these symptoms for 2 weeks or longer.

What treatments can help?

There are different kinds of treatment for depression. Relaxation techniques, meditation, exercise and trying pleasurable activities all show strong evidence for decreasing symptoms of depression.

Treatments for depression can be used alone or combined. They include:

- **Anti-depressants and other prescribed medicines**

  Some medicines can help balance the levels of chemicals in your brain. These medicines can take several weeks before they start to help.

- **Psychotherapy (talk therapy)**

  Psychotherapy is talking to a professional about your depression and what is causing it. They can teach you ways to manage the symptoms that you are experiencing. Ask your health care provider about the different types of psychotherapy that can help manage depression.

- **Neurostimulation**

  Stimulating areas of your brain with an electric current or a magnetic field can help. This might be a treatment to think about when other treatments (such as medicine or therapy) have not worked.

  Neurostimulation treatments include:

  - Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
  - Repetitive Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (rTMS)
  - Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS)

A healthy lifestyle (eating well and exercise) can also help. Social supports and peer groups are important to have and can help you recover.

Please talk to your health care professional if you have any questions about the different treatments.

What are some resources in my community?

The Mood Disorder Association of Ontario (MDAO) can help people across Ontario who have depression, anxiety or bipolar disorder. They offer free support and recovery programs.

Phone number: 416 486 8046

Website: www.mooddisorders.ca

If you are having thoughts of harming yourself at any time, please call the Distress Centre Helpline 416-408-HELP (4357) or visit your closest emergency department.