

What is Depression?

About eight percent of adults in Canada will experience an episode of depression in their life time.

People casually use the phrase, "I'm so depressed" to let others know that they are feeling down. But a temporary case of the blues – something we all experience – has nothing to do with real depression.

Depression is not just about feeling sad or sometimes what people associate feelings of grief. It is an overwhelming and enveloping despair that at times can cause both emotional and physical pain. This is more than a "bad day" or "feeling blue" but there can be several factors that can cause depression.

Some areas of life can be factors in the cause of depression such as family history, recent events such as a major life transition, past history and thoughts and/or behaviors of a negative world view that impacts your mood.

Some of the Symptoms of Depression Include:

- Overwhelming feelings of sadness
- Poor sleep or too much sleep
- Poor concentration or memory
- Feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless

- Feeling slowed down or agitated
- Loss of energy, feeling tired

Risk Factors for Depression

The risk factors for depression are not fully understood. It may be related to:

- A family history of depression
- Biological changes in the brain
- Long periods of high stress
- Relationship problems
- A loss such as a death or loss of a job
- Seasonal changes
- Pregnancy/childbirth

Will I Get Better?

Your family doctor can help you decide the best type of treatment for you or your doctor may refer you to a mental health practitioner for further assessment and treatment.

Depression is very treatable. It can be treated by counselling and/or medication. Often a combination of counselling and medication is most effective.

Age, sex, gender and other life factors can also impact how people experience depression.

Males often experience anger or irritability rather than sadness, which can make depression harder for others to see.

Women often experience sadness and internalized symptoms where men often experience anger or irritability that sometimes makes depression harder for others to see or understand.

Youth and older adults may experience lasting changes in mood that are mistakenly dismissed as a normal part of growing up or aging.

Is There Anything I Can do to Help Myself?

There are many things that you can do to help yourself:

- Work with your doctor. A trusting and honest relationship with your family physician is very important.
- Eat healthy. Even if you don't feel hungry your body needs energy to heal.
- Regular exercise can reduce symptoms of depression. If you have not been active for a long time, start small, like going for a walk.
- Limit drinking too much caffeine. It can make you feel anxious and irritable and make it more difficult to sleep.
- Limit or avoid alcohol and non-prescription drugs. Alcohol and street drugs worsen the symptoms of depression and may also interfere with your prescribed medication.

Resources...

Canadian Mental Health Association: Edmonton » edmonton.cmha.ca

Depression Hurts: www.depressionhurts.ca/en

Mood Disorders of Canada: www.mdsc.ca

If you are having thoughts of suicide, tell your doctor and don't be afraid to use the 24 Hour Distress line, 780-482-HELP (4357) or go to the hospital.