



Depression

Updated

February 2009

# IT'S YOUR HEALTH

This article was produced in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

## Depression

### The Issue

About 11% of men and 16% of women in Canada will experience major depression in the course of their lives. Depression can limit your quality of life, affect relationships, lead to lost time from work or school and contribute to other chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart diseases. Sometimes it leads to suicide. Fortunately, for most people, depression can be treated effectively.

### Background

Everyone has periods of unhappiness in their lives, such as the loss of a loved one or job dissatisfaction. Many people become temporarily down when things don't seem to be going well. These feelings are a normal part of life.

Major depression is a clinical term used by psychiatrists to define a time period that lasts more than two months in which a person feels worthless and hopeless.

### Causes of Depression

Many factors contribute to the development of major depression. An individual may be genetically predisposed to depression, and his or her risk can be increased by several external factors. They include:

- The death or illness of a spouse, friend or family member;

- Difficulties at work or with a personal relationship;
- Low self-esteem;
- Financial difficulties;
- Addictions.

Some people suffer Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) which affects them at the same time every year, usually in the winter when there is less natural light.

Due to hormonal changes, women may experience postpartum depression after giving birth or depression around menopause.

### Symptoms of Depression

Depression can affect the way you think and behave and can have physical effects as well. Some of the signs you should be aware of are:

- Feelings of despair and hopelessness
- Detachment from life and the people around you
- Always feeling tired or having no energy
- Crying for no apparent reason
- Not being able to concentrate or make decisions
- Thoughts of suicide



- A loss of appetite or a change in sleep patterns
- Headaches or stomach upsets that occur frequently.

## Recovery From Depression

Depression is an illness that can be treated. The first step in the recovery process is to recognize that it is an illness, not a sign of personal weakness. Learning that you are not alone, that help is available, is often the start of recovery for many people with depression.

Each individual is unique, requiring a different approach to recovery. The most common and successful treatment is psychological counseling, combined with anti-depressant medication.

Support from family, friends, co-workers and self-help groups can also make a big difference in how well and how quickly the person with depression recovers.

## Minimizing Your Risk

If you or someone close to you suffers from depression, these points may help:

- No individual or family member should feel responsible for depression. It is an illness with often complex causes. Blaming someone for their depression or telling them to “pull themselves together” doesn’t help and may further isolate the individual.
- Talk to your family doctor or a mental health professional about the depression. If a friend or family member is depressed, offer to go with them to make it easier.
- Be a good listener and try to get the person who is depressed to talk about his/her feelings. Let them know that it is all right to talk about these things. Don’t contradict them

or try to “talk them out of it”. They need you to listen.

- Involve other friends and family members if the person with depression agrees. The more support, the better.
- For more information and help, contact the mental health organizations listed in the Need More Info? section.

## Government of Canada’s Role

The Government of Canada works to help Canadians maintain and improve their mental health, including coping with depression. Within its jurisdiction, the Government of Canada works to:

- Support research and its dissemination;
- Strengthen the capacity of the primary health care, home care and acute care sectors to effectively deliver mental health programs and services;
- Raise awareness through social marketing campaigns;
- Conduct surveillance on mental health trends in the population.

In 2007, the federal government provided funding to establish and support the Mental Health Commission of Canada to lead the development of a national mental health strategy, create a knowledge exchange centre and reduce the stigma about mental illness.

## Need More Info?

For more information on depression, contact the following:

The Mental Health Promotion Unit,  
Public Health Agency of Canada at:  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/mhp-psm/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/mh-sm/mhp-psm/index-eng.php)

Health Canada’s Mental Health section at:  
[www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/mental/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/mental/index_e.html)

The Canadian Mental Health Association at: [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)  
Or contact the local Canadian Mental Health Association in your community, listed in the phonebook

Canadian Psychiatric Association  
[www.cpa-apc.org](http://www.cpa-apc.org)

The National Network for Mental Health at: [www.nnmh.ca](http://www.nnmh.ca)

The Canadian Psychological Association at: [www.cpa.ca](http://www.cpa.ca)

The Mood Disorders Society of Canada at: [www.mooodisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooodisorderscanada.ca)

A report on mental illness entitled “The Human Face of Mental Health and Illness in Canada” was published by the Government of Canada in 2006 and is available at:

[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/human-humain06](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/human-humain06)

For additional articles on health and safety issues go to the It’s Your Health Web section at:

[www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh](http://www.healthcanada.gc.ca/iyh)  
You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709

or TTY at 1-800-267-1245\*