

Depression

More common than you think

Depression affects about 121 million people worldwide. There is no one cause of depression, however, the following factors may make some people more prone than others to experience clinical depression:

- specific, distressing life events
- a biochemical imbalance in the brain
- psychological factors, like a negative or pessimistic view of life

The good news is that depression is the most treatable of mental illnesses. Most people who suffer from depression are helped by the treatment they get, which usually includes medication and/or psychological counseling.



Are you suffering from depression?

Many people who are suffering from depression don't even know it. If the feelings of sadness or disappointment you have are severe, last for several weeks, or begin to interfere with your work and social life, you may have a depressive illness.

Some of the signs to look for are:

- feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless
- sleeping more or less than usual
- eating more or less than usual
- having difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- loss of interest in taking part in activities
- decreased sex drive
- avoiding other people
- overwhelming feelings of sadness or grief
- feeling unreasonably guilty
- loss of energy, feeling very tired
- thoughts of death or suicide

Medical professionals encourage those who have been experiencing a number of these symptoms to seek professional help.





What can friends and family do?

Depression doesn't just affect the person directly feeling the symptoms. Dealing with the effects of depression can be very difficult for the people around that person as well. The symptoms can vary: some people who are depressed keep to themselves, while others may not want to be alone.

One of the most important ways you can help people who are depressed is to let them know it's okay to talk about their feelings and thoughts. Listen and offer support, rather than trying to contradict or talk them out of it. Let them know you care! Ask them how you can help, and offer to contact their family doctor or a mental health professional.

People suffering from depression feel it is a mental weakness on their part: they're not "tough enough" to just deal with it. Nothing could be further from the truth! In many cases, the depressive feelings are caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain, a situation that's totally out of their control. Unfortunately, there is still a social stigma surrounding depression, which prevents many people from seeking the proper help.

Treatment for depression

With appropriate treatment, more than 80% of people with depression get either full relief from their symptoms, or substantial improvements. Most people respond best to a combination of medication and psychotherapy.

Other remedies that have proven effective:

- Regular exercise and a healthy diet can help lessen the overall symptoms. So, make a point of going out for a walk several times a week, head to the gym, go golfing—whatever works for you!
- People with Seasonal Affective Disorder ("winter depression") can benefit from light therapy.
- Spiritual faith or practice can give hope to those battling depression.
- People with mild depression may benefit from accenting the positive and increasing pleasurable activities.

Some helpful resources

There are an abundance of websites on the internet that deal with depression. Here are a few selected sites which you may want to visit to learn more:

INFO Visit <http://www.carmha.ca/publications/index.cfm?contentID=6> for a self-help booklet entitled "Antidepressant Skills at Work: Dealing with Mood Problems in the Workplace."

INFO Visit www.cmha.ca and go under the heading "Understanding Mental Illness", then "Mood Disorders", then "Depression" for lots of helpful information.

INFO Visit www.depressioncanada.com and www.depression-web.com to find out more about what depression is, its symptoms, and the medications that can be used to treat it.

INFO Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca for more information about depression, including the risk factors, and treatments.