



Issue #9: Understanding Depression

Everyone feels sad or down at times, and normally these feelings of sadness are short-lived. If these feelings don't subside and are taking over, you may be dealing with depression.



Depression is a medical condition characterized by long-lasting feelings of intense sadness and hopelessness associated with additional mental and physical changes. Depression can affect someone's personal, social, and professional life.

Canadians with depression estimate that they work, at any time, at 62% of their capacity when experiencing symptoms. They spend an average of two hours per working day on non-work-related activities, and 42% leave work early. If current trends continue, by 2020 mental illness will be the second leading cause of disability, globally.

About 1 in 5 women and 1 in 10 men will suffer from depression at some point in life. Depression in children and

adolescents occurs less commonly than in adults. Almost 1.5 million Canadians have serious depression at any given time, but less than one-third of these people seek medical help.

Symptoms of depression may include:

- feelings of restlessness and/or despair;
- sadness throughout the day;
- having difficulty concentrating and making decisions;
- crying for no apparent reason;
- thoughts of suicide;
- feeling tired and/or have no energy; and
- loss of interest in one's favourite activities.



Understanding Depression

Causes

There is no single cause of depression. Rather, it usually results from a combination of factors such as an imbalance of brain chemicals, family history, thoughts or beliefs that increase the risk of depression, and traumatic or stressful life events.

One factor involved in depression is an imbalance of the chemicals that help send messages in the brain. These chemicals in our brain also help regulate our emotions, behaviours, and thinking. How we perceive the world and what happens to us can also contribute to depression.

Depression has a genetic component (i.e., family history). While the tendency to be depressed can be genetically inherited, the onset of depression can be provoked by many factors.

Triggers of depression include:

- difficult or traumatic life changes (such as losing a loved one, ending a relationship, losing a job)
- medical conditions such as Parkinson's disease, stroke, lupus, hypothyroidism, chronic pain, and some types of cancer
- use of certain medications, including corticosteroids, anabolic steroids, narcotics, benzodiazepines, progesterone (found in some female hormonal pills), and street drugs such as amphetamines
- alcohol, which has short-term and possibly long-term depressive effects

It is important to recognize that depression is not a personal weakness or an inability to cope. With appropriate support and treatment you can feel better.

Physicians are trained to help you, and to take depression and its treatment seriously. Together with your doctor, you can begin to identify and manage the nature of the problem, and then develop a treatment plan. This may include a referral to a psychiatrist or psychotherapist.

If you think you may have some of the symptoms of depression, or are concerned about your mental health, or the mental health of a friend or loved one, contact your EFAP for information and support.

 Send us your questions, comments, and suggestions — lifelines@homewoodhealth.com

For more information, to arrange a counselling session, or to access any of your EFAP services, please contact a Client Services Representative. We are ready to speak with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in English or French. All calls are completely confidential.

1.800.663.1142

1.866.398.9505 (**Numéro sans frais - en français**)

1.888.384.1152 (**TTY**)

604.689.1717 **International (Call Collect)**

