



March 2021

Understanding Depression

Sadness is a natural part of being human, and feeling this way for a period of time can be normal. But if these feelings of sadness last for more than a couple of weeks and start interfering with a person's life in a major way, they may be experiencing depression.

Depression is the experience of feeling sad and "down" for a long period of time, to the point of feeling hopeless, helpless and worthless. Depression can interfere with work, family, and relationships. Asking for help sooner than later can promote full recovery and a return to mental health.

Risk factors

A "clinical" or medical depression can happen to anyone. Although there is no single cause, there are some known risk factors:

- Facing challenging life events, such as not doing well at work or school, being bullied or assaulted, being injured in an accident, seeing a very upsetting event, or having a difficult health problem.
- Experiencing traumatic events during childhood
- Having a family member or other relative who's experienced depression
- Living in difficult circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, family conflict or family breakdown
- Misusing drugs or alcohol

Signs of depression

Depression not only changes the way a person feels, but also how they think and act. It's not just about mood. Those close to someone with depression may notice that something is wrong. In fact, sometimes friends and family might sense something's wrong before the person does. A person experiencing depression might:

- ✓ Feel sad or anxious more than usual
- ✓ Feel worried, angry or upset a lot
- ✓ Have trouble coping with everyday activities
- ✓ Lose interest in things they enjoy doing
- ✓ Feel hopeless, worthless or guilty
- ✓ Have trouble sleeping or sleep more than usual
- ✓ Cry a lot
- ✓ Have low energy, or feel restless
- ✓ Want to eat more or less than usual
- ✓ Have trouble paying attention, concentrating or making decisions

Treatment for depression

Since everyone is different, what works best for one person might not work well for another. No matter what treatment is chosen, support from family and friends, as well as learning self-help skills, remain important for recovery. The main thing to keep in mind is that depression is treatable.

Professional Counselling

The primary treatment for depression or anxiety is counselling. Several types of therapy have been shown to be safe and effective for the treatment of depression.

Medications

Anti-depressant medications may be used, often in combination with counselling. They are usually prescribed only when the depression is severe or talk therapy and self-help are not working well on their own. These medications affect the chemical balance in the brain and must be prescribed by a medical professional such as a family doctor, a pediatrician or a psychiatrist.

Managing depression – Self-help tips

- ✓ Eat right, sleep right, get outside, move your body! All of these basic healthy behaviours can make a positive difference to your whole body-mind system.
- ✓ Avoid alcohol and street drugs. These may seem like a way to make you feel better, but in the long run, they can make things a lot worse and can prevent recovery.
- ✓ Find ways to reduce stress where and when you can. Try out yoga or tai chi, or learn how to meditate.
- ✓ Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings. Try to come up with one or two things you're grateful for every day and make a note of them. It can help.
- ✓ Express yourself creatively. For example, dance, draw, or make music.
- ✓ Begin a doctor approved exercise program

Helping a friend or family member

You can play a key role in helping a person who is depressed:

- Be a good listener and avoid making any judgments.
- Encourage your friend or family member to get other help as well, and assist them in finding it.
- Offer to go with them to appointments.
- Stay in regular contact; let them know you're there for them.
- Make plans together to do things you both enjoy.

Finding help

You may find that the support of family, friends and your doctor is enough to help you feel good again. If not, please be in touch with a professional EFAP counsellor or your family doctor.

(with thanks to the Canadian Mental Health Association)



Vancouver Island Counselling

Duncan **250 746 6900**

Nanaimo **250 754 8222**

Port Alberni **250 723 7001**

Victoria / Gulf Islands / Lower Mainland
1 877 746 6911



Counsellors' Corner

- *In any given year 1 in 5 Canadians will experience a mental health problem.*
- *Approximately 8% of adults will experience major depression at some point in their life.*
- *By age 40, about half of Canadians will have (or have had) a mental illness.*