

Depression

A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

If you have been diagnosed with depression, this handout will provide you with information to help you understand and manage your illness. It is designed to help you take an active role, as a partner with your physician, in treating your depression.

What is depression?

First of all, you need to know that depression can affect anyone. Up to 15% of adults will, at some time during their life, suffer from depression. You may be depressed if you have any of the following symptoms nearly every day, all day, for two weeks or longer:

- No interest or pleasure in things you used to enjoy
- A low mood that lasts longer than is normal for you
- Feeling anxious, worthless or guilty
- Feeling numb or empty emotionally, perhaps even to the point of not being able to cry
- Feeling slowed down, tired all the time, or, conversely, feeling restless and unable to sit still
- Change in appetite, leading to weight gain or loss
- Problems sleeping, especially in the early morning, or wanting to sleep all of the time
- Trouble thinking, remembering, focusing on what you're doing, or making everyday decisions
- Thinking about death or suicide

What causes depression?

The cause of depression is not fully known. A number of factors may be involved, such as chemical imbalances in the brain or family history. Sometimes depression can be linked to stressful events, such as the death of a loved one, a divorce or job loss. Certain medicines, overuse of drugs and alcohol, and chronic diseases can also lead to depression. Depression isn't caused by personal weakness, lack of willpower, or a 'bad attitude'.

Whatever the cause, it is important to know that depression can be successfully treated. There is hope for recovery. However, many depressed people find it difficult both to seek help and to take care of themselves. Finding a family physician you can confide in is a critical first step to recovery. Taking an active role in dealing with your depression is also essential. Learning self-management skills that will help you cope with depression can lead to faster recovery and reduce the chances of it reoccurring.

How is depression treated?

Once your physician has assessed the severity of your illness, treatment may involve medicine, psychotherapy and self-management. Any one of these treatments, used alone or in combination, may give you the best results.

Antidepressant Medication

Medications for depression are called antidepressants. Antidepressants are an effective and widely used treatment. It may take some time to find the medication that works best for you. You may notice some effects of antidepressants within the first week, but you probably won't see the full effects for six to eight weeks.

Some people experience mild side effects at the start of treatment, but these may go away over time or with adjustments to your medication. Like all medications, however, there may be uncommon, but more serious side effects. Talk to your physician if you find side effects hard to cope with or experience any agitation, worsening of depression, or increase in suicidal thoughts.

Antidepressants are not addictive; however, you should never stop taking antidepressants suddenly without consulting your physician. Doing so may cause a variety of unpleasant symptoms such as flu-like sensations, insomnia, nausea, balance problems and agitation.

Psychotherapy

Certain types of psychotherapy such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) and Problem-Solving Therapy (PST) can be as effective as antidepressants. Many psychologists and some other mental health professionals provide these types of therapy. The focus of psychotherapy may be on your thoughts and beliefs or on your relationships. It may also help you look at your behaviour, how it's affecting you, and what you can do differently. Sessions are usually taken individually or in a group about once or twice a week for 8 to 12 weeks.

Ask your physician to recommend a therapist or a program for you.

Note: Psychotherapy services provided by a psychologist are not an insured benefit under MSP, but may be covered by some extended benefit plans. They may also be available at no charge at mental health centres run by your local health authority (see blue pages in your phone book).

For help locating a psychotherapist, contact:

- BC Psychological Association Referral Service: 1 800 730-0522
- BC Association of Clinical Counsellors: www.bc-counsellors.org/
- Employee Assistance Programs offered by your employer.

Self-Management: Taking An Active Role in Your Treatment

There are many things that you can do to help yourself get through your depression and reduce the risk of a relapse. Self-management does not mean dealing with your illness alone. It means being an active partner with your physician or other health care provider, communicating honestly and effectively, and being well-informed on treatment options. Most importantly, it means following through on the treatment or action plan that you and your physician decide upon – and that usually includes behavioural and lifestyle changes.

Resources for People with Depression

Self-Management

- *Self-Care Depression Program Patient Guide* – This booklet, published by the University of British Columbia, can help you manage depression by reactivating your life, challenging negative thinking habits, and solving problems effectively. Available at: www.mheccu.ubc.ca/publications/
- *BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information* – provides both a Mental Disorders Toolkit and a Depression Toolkit designed to develop core self-management skills. Both can be found at: www.mentalhealthaddictions.bc.ca/content/products/products.php#deptoolkit
- *Changeways* – Group workshops teach a variety of problem-solving and lifestyle management skills. Offered by most Mental Health Centres in BC. Contact your local health authority (listed in the blue pages of your phone book).
- Chronic Disease Self-Management Program is a patient education program offered in communities throughout British Columbia that teaches practical skills in managing chronic health problems. See: www.coag.ubc.ca/cdsmp/ or call toll free: 1 866 902-3767.

General Information and Support

- BC Mental Health Information Line – provides free information 24 hours a day about symptoms, causes, treatments, support groups and publications. 1 800 661-2121 or 604 669-7600 in the Lower Mainland.
- Mental Health Centres. Contact your local health authority (see blue pages in your phone book) to find out what services are available.
- BC HealthGuide Program – this program includes handbooks, on-line and phone components. *The BC HealthGuide Handbook* provides medically approved information on depression and resources available to BC residents. *BC HealthGuide OnLine* provides on-line information on treatment, assessment and support groups. See: www.bchealthguide.org/kbaltindex.asp
- The BC NurseLine – provides 24/7 access to registered nurses and seven days-a-week access to pharmacists between 5 pm and 9 am. 1 866 215-4700 toll-free; 604 215-4700 within Greater Vancouver; 1 866 889-4700 hearing-impaired toll free.
- Mood Disorders Association of BC – provides support groups and information. 604 873-0103. See: www.mdabc.ca.
- Canadian Mental Health Association (BC) – resources and local branch information 1 800 555-8222 or 604 688-3234 See: www.cmha-bc.org.

Depression Web Sites

The following sites offer valuable information on depression and self-care:

- PsychDirect (Cdn) is a public education & information program at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. Site includes a self-test quiz for depression. See: www.psychdirect.com/index.htm
- National Institute of Mental Health (US) Web site to learn more about the symptoms of depression and depression with other illnesses: See: www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/cooccurmenu.cfm
- NHS National Electronic Library for Health (UK) web site on mood disorders answers your questions about depression and other mood disorders. See: www.nelmh.org/home_affective_disorders.asp?c=3

Crisis Support

- Emergency section of your local phone book provides phone numbers for local crisis lines.
- The Suicide Information & Education Centre (Cdn) provides information on suicide and suicidal behaviour. It has a list of phone numbers for crisis centres/lines throughout BC. See: www.suicideinfo.ca/support/canada/bc.htm or call 604-872-1811 for the number of the nearest centre to you.
- Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of British Columbia provides local crisis centre phone numbers See: www.crisiscentrebc.bc.ca