

DEPRESSION



it's more than a case of the blues...



Are you...

Feeling unhappy most of the time?

Losing interest in the things you used to enjoy?

Waking up exhausted and struggling to make it through each day?

Having difficulty concentrating or making decisions?

Feeling overwhelmed and hopeless?

Like three million other Canadian adults, you may be suffering from depression.

Get the facts.*

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* Source: Canadian Mental Health Association.



Depression—it's more common than you think

Depression affects men and women of any age, occupation, or social status—often in their prime working years. As a matter of fact, nearly 8 per cent of all Canadians will experience depression at some point in their lives.

A serious medical illness

It's normal to feel “blue” or down in the dumps every now and then. Misfortune or personal problems can leave us all struggling with feelings of loss, sadness, frustration, or disappointment. But, when these emotions persist for more than a few weeks and intensify as time goes by, it may be a sign of depression.

Depression is a serious medical illness that can interfere with your ability to carry out the normal functions of everyday life. It can change the way you think and behave, and undermine your sense of personal well-being.

The effects of depression can also affect everyone around you—friends and family, colleagues and co-workers.

What to look for—signs and symptoms of depression

Depression may begin suddenly or it may develop slowly over a period of weeks or months. While everyone experiences depression in his or her own way, there are some common warning signs:

Personal changes

- Uninterested in work, hobbies, people, sex
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Feeling useless, hopeless, excessively guilty
- Feeling agitated, restless, irritable
- Feeling overwhelmingly sad; crying easily
- Lacking in self-esteem; unconfident
- Chronically tired; unenergetic
- Sleeping or eating more than usual
- Abusing drugs, alcohol

Workplace changes

- Unable to concentrate, plan, make decisions
- Less productive
- Frequently late; using more sick days
- More irritable and impatient with students
- Unenthusiastic about work
- Often tired
- Uncooperative, less dependable
- Making noticeably more errors at work than usual
- Taking safety risks; having accidents



Causes of depression

Depression can be triggered by:

- Major life events—death of a loved one, miscarriage, divorce, job loss
- Genetic factors—people with a family history of depression are more susceptible
- Chronic illnesses—e.g. arthritis, heart disease, cancer—possibly as a side effect of medications and/or loss of quality of life

Gender may also play a role in depression. Women are twice as likely to suffer from depression, particularly during menstrual cycle changes, pregnancy, the postpartum period, and menopause.

Stress

Stress is one of the major risk factors for depression. Workplace stress has many causes but is commonly associated with excessive time and workload pressures.

A recent ETFO study found that over 90 per cent of all Ontario public elementary teachers felt they were overworked. Not surprisingly, more than 69 per cent also felt that their workload was having a negative impact on their physical and mental health.

Workplace exposure to high levels of chronic stress puts teachers at particular risk for depression.

Key causes of teacher stress

- Long working hours
- Lack of administrative support
- Excessive workload
- Large class sizes
- Lack of specialist teachers
- Unreasonable expectations
- Lack of necessary supports to do the job

Dealing with job stress

Prolonged exposure to stress can cause serious health issues. By making a few, simple lifestyle changes you can significantly reduce your stress levels and lower your risk of depression:

- Take control of your life—Set achievable goals at work and at home. Being realistic about what you can accomplish will help you overcome feelings of hopelessness and loss of control.
- Improve your time management skills—Manage your workload by prioritizing responsibilities and working to a planned schedule. Job satisfaction will improve when you focus on tasks that are personally and professionally meaningful.
- Make time for relationships—Take time to connect with family and friends. A strong support network makes stress easier to manage.
- Eat well—Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help maintain good mental and physical health.
- Regular exercise (as simple as a 10-minute walk three times a day) reduces stress and relieves symptoms of depression.

Supporting a colleague suffering from depression

Sometimes, people suffer needlessly with depression because they are embarrassed, or worried about gossip and work consequences. If you suspect that a colleague is depressed, be supportive and understanding.

Lend a sympathetic ear and try to get your colleague to talk openly about his or her thoughts and feelings. Remember that your colleague is ill and may react strongly to the things you say or do. Be patient, caring, and respectful, even if your support is not immediately appreciated.

Most importantly, encourage your colleague to seek professional help. The sooner she or he gets help, the sooner life will return to normal.

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Depression can be treated successfully

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression, it's important to get professional help as soon as possible. Most people with depression can be successfully treated with counselling, medication and lifestyle changes.

How to get help

- For health-related concerns, contact your physician. Your doctor may refer you to a psychiatrist, psychologist or specially trained social worker.
- For work-related concerns, contact your local or provincial federation office. Your federation representative will help you obtain support through your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and will help answer your questions regarding access to sick leave, long-term disability (LTD) and workplace accommodations.
- For personal support, rely on a trusted family member, friend or faith leader. People close to you can be a caring source of support during difficult times. Self-help groups and other local community services may also offer practical advice and guidance to help you manage your depression.

If you feel desperate and need help immediately, go to the emergency department of your local hospital.

Returning to work

Your return-to-work program will be structured according to the recommendations of your doctor or therapist. If you require workplace accommodations, your local federation representative will help you make the appropriate arrangements with your board.

Sometimes, a gradual return to work is the best approach. As you progress from part-time to full-time hours, you can set your own pace for recovery and experience the success of each new accomplishment.

For many people, returning to work is one of the best ways to overcome the isolation and sadness associated with depression.

Depression can be treated successfully

**Take the first step towards recovery and
talk to your doctor today**



**Elementary Teachers'
Federation of Ontario**

**Fédération des enseignantes et des
enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario**

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