

Pacific Regional Centre for Healthy Aging

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Depression

What is Depression?

Everyone feels sad, worried, or lonely at times. But if these feelings won't go away, and you aren't doing the things you used to do, you might have depression.

Depression is a serious illness. It stops you from enjoying life. If it is not treated, it can make other health problems worse and even lead to death.

Luckily, help is available from the health care system and community services. Also, you can take simple actions to help you recover from and prevent depression.

Symptoms of Depression

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Losing interest in food or losing weight for no obvious reason
- Low energy
- Trouble concentrating
- Forgetfulness

- Negative thinking that doesn't go away
- Thinking about suicide
- Feeling life is not worth living
- Crying a lot for no obvious reason
- Feeling tired even when you are not doing much
- Not staying in touch with family and friends

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms and they don't go away, call your health care provider.

Depression and Aging

Depression can affect anyone, at any age. Older adults can be especially at risk because of events that happen in their life, such as

- Losing a partner or other loved ones
- Losing touch with friends and community
- Moving into a care home or hospital
- Ongoing health problems, sometimes several at once
- Lifestyle changes such as becoming less active or not going out as much

Sometimes, older adults with depression don't get the care they need. This is because some people think it's normal for an older person to seem sad a lot of the time, or to lose interest in things they used to love. But depression is not a normal part of aging. If you or someone around is showing signs of depression, get help.

Depression can make other health problems worse. People with depression are usually less active, so they can become weaker and can fall more often. People with depression are less likely to follow a rehabilitation program after surgery or an injury. This means they won't get better. They are less likely to go to the doctor when they need to. Treating depression can save lives.

Depression Facts

Depression is a change in brain chemistry. It is not just a feeling. It can be caused by many things, including other diseases. It can show up as physical symptoms like breathing problems, sleeping problems, constipation, and passing out for short periods of time.

Depression can't be healed by just "changing your attitude." It is an illness that needs treatment. Working with thoughts (called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) can sometimes help with depression. This is a specific technique that often works best combined with other therapies.

Preventing Depression

Seven things you can do to prevent depression

1. Be physically active – 30 minutes of moderate exercise 5 days a week is best (walking counts!)
2. Eat a healthy diet (a Mediterranean diet has the most evidence)
3. Get your ears and eyes tested regularly and wear your hearing aids and glasses if you need them

4. Be socially active—spend time with friends and family, go out to community and cultural events, visit neighbours, and do things with other people
5. Review your medications with a pharmacist or primary care provider. Some medications can cause symptoms of depression.
6. Get enough sleep
7. Avoid alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco

These activities do more than prevent depression, they keep your brain and body healthy to improve your overall quality of life as you age.

Treatment

When people are depressed, they might feel like they will never feel good again. But depression is a treatable illness. In fact, there are many different options. Treatment choices depend on each individual situation and often involve several different approaches.

Treatment Options

Healthy living: Changes in how you eat and sleep, finding ways to be more active and social, and doing things you love can put you on the path to recovery.

Self-Help: Books, videos, on-line courses, and podcasts can help you learn techniques that will change your brain chemistry and improve your mood.

Community support: Many clinics and community centres offer support groups, courses, and other programs. It can be scary at first to talk to strangers about your feelings, but it can help you get better.

Counselling: Talking with a psychologist, social worker, or psychotherapist can be an effective way to recover from depression. Counselling can be one-on-one or in groups, on-line or in-person.

Medication: There are many medications for treating depression. Each has pros and cons. Your doctor can talk you through the options.

Neurostimulation treatments: Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) can be helpful for severe depression that hasn't been helped with other methods. Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) is a new type of treatment that uses magnets to stimulate the brain. A psychiatrist can determine if these therapies are right for you.

Hospital stay: Sometimes depression is bad enough that you need to stay in the hospital. You will have a team of mental health specialists taking care of you.

Learn more here: [The Treatment of Depression for Older Adults](#), an info-sheet from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health.

Finding Treatment

If you think you might be experiencing depression

- Talk to your primary care provider. They have training in diagnosing and treating depression and other mood disorders
- If you don't have a primary care provider, go to a walk-in clinic

Find information about treatment and programs

Contact the mental health team in the area you live. Each area of B.C. has a mental health and substance use program that offers different types of support. Find them here:

[Fraser Health: Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
[Interior Health: Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
[Island Health: Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
[Northern Health: About Mental Health & Addiction Services](#)
[Vancouver Coastal Health: Mental Health and Substance Use](#)
[First Nations Health Authority: Mental Wellness and Substance Use](#)

Note sure which Health Authority you are in? Find out [here](#).

- Use online directories to find local resources
 - [Mental Health and Substance Use Supports in B.C.—Mood and Anxiety](#)
 - [PathwaysBC](#) Community Services Directory
- Call the B.C. Mental Health Support Line at 310-6789 (no area code) for information about services in your area
- Call [BC211](#) to find health care resources in your community. Just dial 2-1-1 any time of day or night. Help is available in over 130 languages.

Tips for talking to your care provider <https://ccsmh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/WEB-CCSMH-Depression-Brochure.pdf>

- Go with a family member or friend
- Make notes ahead of time about your symptoms
- Ask for more information about depression
- Book a follow up visit soon after

Support your recovery while waiting for treatment and during treatment by taking care of yourself. Keep reading to learn how!

Taking Care of Yourself When You Feel Depressed

There are many ways to start feeling better. Remember, small actions can make a difference.

Take action to improve your state of mind

- Do something you love
- Spend time with others
- Listen to your favourite music

- Go for a walk

Join a group

- Join a support group for people experiencing depression. You will learn that you are not alone and that you can help others while they are helping you
- Join a social club. Most communities have programs like seniors' lunches, walking groups, or clubs based on activities

Learn mental health skills

- Sign up for a course in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), a simple and powerful way of working with your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to help with symptoms of depression or anxiety
- Learn about mindfulness training or other types of relaxation and meditation techniques

Find courses, groups, and programs

- Contact your local recreation centre or seniors centre
- Call 211
- Use [PathwaysBC](#), an on-line directory of community services

Resources

Websites

[HereToHelp](#)

Mental health and substance use information. You can [email with questions](#), find [answers to common questions](#), and find [easy-to-read booklets on mental health topics in many different languages](#)

[HealthLinkBC webpage on depression in older adults](#)

How to recognize and treat depression with a focus on older adults

[HealthLinkBC webpage on depression](#)

A thorough overview of depression in adults including where to get help, options for treatment, and [a quiz called "Are You Depressed?"](#)

[PathwaysBC](#)

An on-line directory of treatment options, education, support groups, and more. Search for resources close to where you live as well as online.

[Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health](#)

Clear information, a short video, and direction to more resources

Phone Support

B.C. Mental Health Support: 310-6789 (no area code needed)

24 hours a day, seven days a week, available in 140 languages

Emotional support, information, and resources specific to mental health. You can call about your own mental health challenges or to help you care for a friend or family member. Offered by the Crisis Lines Association of British Columbia.

Suicide Assessment and Intervention: 1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE)

24 hours a day, seven days a week, available in 140 languages

Talk to someone if you are in a crisis, if you have been thinking about suicide, or if you are concerned about someone in your life. Provides emotional support right away and help finding longer-term support.

Seniors Distress Line (Greater Vancouver): 604-872-1234

[B.C. Bereavement Helpline](#): 604-738-9950 or toll-free 1-877-779-2223

Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

contact@bcbh.ca

For people who have lost someone they love

B.C. 811

Free, non-emergency health information for anyone in your family. Call 8-1-1 anytime. Available in many languages. Provided by [HealthLinkBC](#)

B.C. 211

Provides information about services in your community such as counselling and support groups. Call 2-1-1 anytime. Available in many languages.

For First Nations and Indigenous help lines, see [below](#)

For **more help lines** in B.C., visit [Crisis Centre – Get Help](#).

If you are in an **emergency**, call **9-1-1**

Courses, Coaching, and Support Groups

[Self-Management BC](#)

Free health programs for adults in B.C. with ongoing health conditions, including depression. Programs are offered in person, virtually, online, by telephone, or by mail. Services available in English and for Chinese, Punjabi, and Indigenous communities.

Call toll-free 1-866-902-3767

selfmgmt@uvic.ca

[Bounce Back program](#)

Bounce Back is for people dealing with low mood, stress, or anxiety. You learn skills from a DVD, or you can talk to someone on the phone. The program is free. Talk to your doctor if you want to sign up for Bounce Back. Bounce back is run by the Canadian Mental Health Association.

[Mood Disorders Association of B.C.](#)

This group helps people who have depression and other mood problems. They have support groups and other programs across B.C. To find a group in your community, visit their website at www.mdabc.net or call 604-873-0103.

[B.C. Bereavement Helpline](#)

This group will help you find a bereavement support group in your community.
Call 604-738-9950 or toll-free 1-877-779-2223
contact@bcbh.ca

Booklets

[Are You Feeling Sad and Lonely as You Age?](#)

An eight-page booklet with basic information and ways to take action from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health

[Depression](#)

An easy-to-read booklet about depression that tells you what it is, how it can be treated, and where to find help. Published by The Canadian Mental Health Association

[Depression in Older Adults: A Guide for Seniors and Their Families](#)

A 14-page booklet from the Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health

Support for LGBTQ+

[Here to Help LGBT Mental Health](#)

[TransCare BC Mental Health and Support](#)

Support for First Nations and Indigenous Peoples

Phone Support—24 Hours a Day

Hope for Wellness Help Line offers mental health counselling and crisis intervention by phone or online chat. Call toll-free **1-855-242-3310** or start a confidential chat with a counsellor at **hopeforwellness.ca**

Indian Residential School Crisis Line is a national service for anyone experiencing pain or distress because of their residential school experience. Call toll-free **1-866-925-4419**

Kuu-Uu Crisis Line Society provides crisis services for Indigenous people across BC. **Adults/Elders line 250-723-4050**. Or call **toll free 1-800-588-8717**. Learn more at **www.kuu-uscisline.com**.

Métis Crisis Line: 1-833-MétisBC (1-833-638-4722)

[Mental Health and Wellness Supports from the First Nations Health Authority](#)

A guide to help lines, counselling, [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day](#) program, a suicide prevention toolkit, and more. All resources are culturally safe and trauma-informed.

Help for Immigrants and Newcomers

[Mental Health and Well-Being Support for Newcomers](#)

Website with links to useful information and resources, and a short video. Provided by the Government of Canada.

[Welcome B.C.—Start Your Life in Canada Support and Help](#)