

Do You Suffer From Depression?

By Heather Pollett

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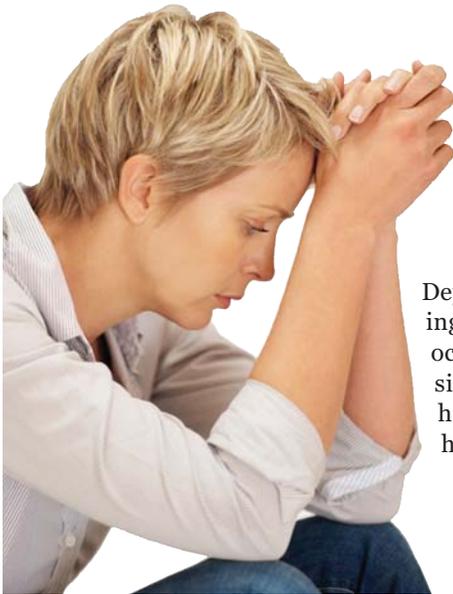
A survey conducted by Ipsos-Reid for the Great-West Life Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace found that 22 per cent of Canadian workers have depression. Workplace depression is not a new problem, and depression doesn't just exist in workplaces. Anywhere people work, study and live, you will find depression; it exists in schools, churches, health-care facilities, and maybe even your own home.

It's normal to feel sad from time to time. However, when these feelings are long-lasting or affect your ability to function at work or at home, it may be depression.

Major depression will affect about eight per cent of Canadians during the course of their lives. It is characterized by the following symptoms that persist over an extended period of time:

- Loss of interest and a lack of pleasure in activities, including sex
- Withdrawal from social situations
- Ongoing feelings of sadness, anxiety, worthlessness, hopelessness and/or guilt
- Changes in appetite, or an unexplained fluctuation in weight
- Lack of energy, complaints of fatigue
- Sleep disturbances (insomnia or excessive sleeping)
- Loss of focus, decreased concentration, forgetfulness
- Complaints of physical ill health with no identifiable cause
- Thoughts of suicide

Depression can affect people of all ages, including children and seniors, but onset typically occurs during adolescence. The rate of depression is higher in people with co-existing health conditions such as stroke, cancer, heart disease, and alcohol and drug use.



Alcohol and drugs are sometimes used to self-medicate and ease the painful symptoms of depression. Women tend to experience depression at twice the rate of men, and they can develop post-partum depression after giving birth.

Although depression is a common health issue that can be treated, people may be reluctant to talk about their symptoms or reach out to those who may be suffering. This is due in part to the misconceptions and negative attitudes about mental illness. People with depression are not weak, lazy, stupid or dangerous. Depression is not a normal part of the aging process. People with depression can't just "snap out of it." These myths persist from a time when there was a lack of knowledge about mental illness.

Depression is caused by a combination of factors, including family history and genetics, biology, environment, physical illness, medications, personality and coping skills. Workplace stress or an event such as the death of a loved one can contribute to depression as well.

Prevention and treatment

Most people get better with the right treatment and supports, such as psychotherapy, counselling, medication, education, self-help and peer support. Depending on the severity of the symptoms, some people may feel the need to reduce their activities at home or work, or take time off to recover. Employers can help by promoting good mental health practices, reducing stress and creating respectful workplaces.

There are things you can do to

help prevent depression or ease the symptoms, including exercising regularly, keeping in touch with friends and family, practising good nutrition, sleeping well, and limiting alcohol and stress.

If you are a friend, relative, employer or coworker of an individual who may be dealing with depression, educate yourself about the illness. Ask the individual how you can support them, and be mindful of your own words that may trivialize mental illness or perpetuate stigma.

If you are experiencing symptoms of depression and feel you may need help, talk to your health-care provider or a mental health professional in your community.

Warning signs of suicide should not be ignored. If you are worried that someone you know may be thinking about suicide, talk to them about it and listen without judgement. Help them get help. If you feel overwhelmed by your feelings of depression or are thinking of suicide, reach out: tell a health-care provider or someone you trust, or call the Mental Health Crisis line at 709-737-4668 (toll free 1-888-737-4668), or another emergency service in your area.

Many people who live and work amongst us in our communities are recovering from depression and are doing well. There is always hope. For more information on depression, visit www.cmhanl.ca for our "Spotlight on Depression." 📧

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