



Health and Wellness

Winter Doldrums...



By Dr. Delia Roberts

Winter brings the challenges of wet and cold, icy roads and short daylight hours. Everything seems a little harder to do, but for some, grey skies can also contribute to a downward shift in mood. It can be hard to stay positive in the face of uncertainty at work, home and on the world stage at the best of times, but if you find yourself feeling especially sad, hopeless and low in energy from the fall through to spring, you may be suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)

SAD is a form of depression, and while it typically occurs during the winter, some people can experience it in other seasons. SAD affects about 2-3% of the Canadian population but another 15% of people

experience a milder form of SAD that leaves them feeling depressed but still able to carry on with their lives. Roughly 10% of all depression is thought to be caused by SAD. Risk factors for SAD include a family history, living further north where the daylight hours are shorter, age (adults) and gender (women are more likely to report SAD than men). Risk factors for depression in general also include major life changes and any kind of stressful event.

Whether you experience consistently low and overwhelming feelings in the winter or all year around, or know someone who does, it's important to be aware of the symptoms of depression as well as where you can go for help. The sooner depression is treated the more likely the symptoms can be resolved and the greater the probability of restoring a normal positive outlook on life. Men in particular are often reluctant to speak about feeling depressed, for many, there is still a stigma associated with asking for help with mental health. If you, a family member, friend or colleague is showing some of the signs of depression, being open to speaking about it is the first step towards feeling better.

How to recognize depression

Depression is characterized by feeling some of the following symptoms. Not everyone feels all of them, but the difference between a short-term response to stress and true

depression is the consistency of the symptoms, and a longer duration of more than a few weeks.

- Feeling sad, anxious, or empty
- Hopelessness, or feeling like things will never get better
- Being irritable, easily annoyed or angry
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or enjoyment in hobbies and activities that used to be fun
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Feeling tired and not wanting to do anything
- Finding it hard to concentrate, remember things, or make decisions
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, or waking up in the early-morning
- Sleeping more, not wanting to get out of bed
- Increase or decrease in appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death, planning for suicide, or suicide attempts

Getting help

It's important to understand that everyone has times where life seems to be extra hard. Being able to reach out to others to talk things through, share feelings and get support is essential for getting through the tough times. Asking for help does not make you weak or vulnerable, it is a necessary part of navigating life. If you don't feel that you can confide in

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a friend or family member follow the links at the end of this article to find confidential resources that can help. Either way, a great place to start is with your family physician. Your primary care doctor is trained to help recognize depression, ensure that there isn't any underlying illness and manage your care in a comprehensive way. They can direct you towards the right kind of treatment which can include any of the following:

1. Get some exercise every day, ideally out doors in natural light. Take even a 10-minute break, get out of your machine or away from your desk. Walk, breathe, look around you and empty your mind of the worries and stresses. Physical activity has been shown over and over to reduce depression rates across the board. Find an exercise buddy and commit to meet 3x week for 30 minutes of any form of physical activity that gets your heart rate up and your breathing to the point where it is hard to carry on a conversation. On the days that you don't feel like going, they can motivate you to get out. Another day, you will do the same for them.
2. Consider talking to a mental health professional. Certified counselors are trained to help you re-focus your mind, problem solve and develop effective coping strategies so that when life presents you with hurdles you have the skills you need to get through them. They won't make your problems go away, but they can help you figure out how to deal with them. Unfortunately, most of us have never been provided with this information, we don't get taught it in school and unless we have been exceptionally fortunate to have great role models, we've never learned how to manage all the stress that life can throw at you.
3. In some cases depression is the result of chemical imbalances in the brain. There are a number of different types of medications that can be useful in helping with depression, anxiety and inability to concentrate. Your family doctor can determine if one of these can help you. It doesn't mean that you will always need this medication, but when your thoughts and

feelings are overwhelming and control your behavior, they can help you get back in the driver's seat. Be careful of self-medicating, whether you choose herbal remedies, alcohol or other substances. Although they might make you feel better in the short term, they have other effects on your body and are not going to make your problems go away.

Self-help

If you don't feel comfortable reaching out, or your job and lifestyle prevent you from being able to work with anyone else, there are some good self-help programs available. Ideally, they will provide you with more information so that you can understand how depression affects you, and step by step instructions and exercises to help you learn how to manage your thoughts. Here are the links to two:

<https://www.walkalong.ca/explore/MoodGYM>

<https://www.keltyskey.com/courses/depression/>

More Resources

Mood Disorders Association of BC

Visit www.mdabc.net or call 604-873-0103 (in the Lower Mainland) or 1-855-282-7979 (in the rest of BC) for resources and information on mood disorders. You'll also find more information on support groups around the province.

Canadian Mental Health Association, BC Division

Visit www.cmha.bc.ca or call 1-800-555-8222 (toll-free in BC) or 604-688-3234 (in Greater Vancouver) for information and community resources on mental health or any mental illness.

BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information

Visit www.heretohelp.bc.ca for info sheets and personal stories about seasonal affective disorder. You'll also find more information, tips and self-tests to help you understand many different mental health problems.

HealthLink BC

Call 811 or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca to access free, non-emergency health information for anyone in your family,

including mental health information. Through 811, you can also speak to a registered nurse about symptoms you're worried about, or talk with a pharmacist about medication questions.

Crisis Lines

Crisis lines aren't only for people in crisis. You can call for information on local services or if you just need someone to talk to. If you are in distress, call **310-6789** (do not add 604, 778 or 250 before the number) 24 hours a day to connect to a BC crisis line, without a wait or busy signal. The crisis lines linked in through **310-6789** have received advanced training in mental health issues and services by members of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information.

Depression in Men

<https://headsupguys.org/mens-depression/>
<https://www.bchealthyliving.ca/what-we-do/working-on-wellness/healthy-minds/>

Taking the time to learn good coping skills is a great way to improve everything in your life, and the lives of the people around you. While it can often take a crisis to motivate us to start on this kind of work, it need not be the case. Learning to self-reflect and manage stress and our emotional responses to life's challenges is the best kind of preventative maintenance we can do. Check out some of the links above and get started today. You won't regret it. 🍏

Canadian pilots critical of new safety rules to address fatigue

At the end of last year, Transport Canada announced new rules to address pilot fatigue through reductions in duty hours and to further prohibit alcohol consumption before flying.

Pilots may not consume alcohol for 12 hours before a flight, an increase of four hours over the previous eight-hour ban.

Canada's largest pilot association with more than 4,000 members, the Air Canada Pilots Association, however, was profoundly disappointed and said that the changes were substandard and inconsistent with international best practice that should see at least two more hours cut from duty hours.

See this CBC article for more information: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/garneau-pilot-safety-airline-regulations-1.4942385> 🍏

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The editor
Forest Safety News
420 Albert Street
Nanaimo BC V9R 2V7

Call 1-877-741-1060 or
email editor@bcforestsafesafe.org 🍏



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