

## Medication

Antidepressants are the main kind of medication used to treat depression. There are many different classes and types of antidepressants, and they each work a little differently. However, antidepressants may not be the best option for bipolar disorder. Instead, bipolar disorder may be treated with mood stabilizers. While medication can help with some symptoms, they can't get rid of the thinking patterns or beliefs that can drive mood problems. Most people use a combination of medication and counselling.

## Other options

If depression is very serious or lasts for a long time, doctors may recommend electroconvulsive therapy (or 'ECT'). ECT can be very helpful, especially when other treatments haven't worked. There are other options such as light therapy for certain kinds of depression, but it's best to talk with your care team before you try something new.

## Relapse prevention

A big part of recovery is learning to recognize relapse. A relapse is when symptoms come back. Seeking help as early as possible can do a lot to reduce problems or challenges. Relapse prevention plans—prepared when you're well—often map out early warning signs, list treatment strategies that have worked in the past, and assign tasks to key people who can support you in your recovery. Your plan may be a formal arrangement with your care team or an informal plan with loved ones.

## HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE?

When someone you love is diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder, you may wonder how you can really help. You can offer support in different ways: you can offer emotional support or practical support to help make the journey less daunting. You can also help a loved one watch for signs of relapse or other difficulties, which is an important part in maintaining wellness.

People who experience an episode of depression may have thoughts of ending their life. This is a sign that a loved one needs extra support. If you believe that a loved one is in danger, don't hesitate to call 911 or your local crisis line.

Here are some tips for supporting someone you love:

- Learn more about the illness and listen to your loved one so you have a better understanding of their experiences.
- Someone who experiences an episode of depression may want to spend time alone or act out in frustration, and this can hurt other people's feelings. These are just symptoms—it isn't about you.
- Ask your loved one how you can help. Think about practical help with day-to-day tasks, too.
- Make sure your expectations are realistic. Recovery takes time and effort. It means a lot when you recognize your loved one's work towards wellness, regardless of the outcome.
- Set your own boundaries, and talk about behaviour you aren't willing to deal with.
- Seek support for yourself and think about joining a support group for loved ones. If family members are affected by a loved one's illness, consider family counselling.

## DO YOU NEED MORE HELP?

Contact a community organization like the Canadian Mental Health Association to learn more about support and resources in your area.

Founded in 1918, The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a national charity that helps maintain and improve mental health for all Canadians. As the nation-wide leader and champion for mental health, CMHA helps people access the community resources they need to build resilience and support recovery from mental illness.

**Visit the CMHA website at [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) today.**



**Canadian Mental Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

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# DEPRESSION AND BIPOLAR DISORDER



**Canadian Mental Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

We all experience changes in our mood. Sometimes we feel energetic, full of ideas, or irritable, and other times we feel sad or down. But these moods usually don't last long, and we can go about our daily lives. Depression and bipolar disorder are two mental illnesses that change the way people feel and make it hard for them to go about their daily routine.

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a mental illness that affects a person's mood—the way a person feels. Mood impacts the way people think about themselves, relate to others, and interact with the world around them. This is more than a 'bad day' or 'feeling blue.' Without supports like treatment, depression can last for a long time.

Signs of depression include feeling sad, worthless, hopeless, guilty, or anxious a lot of the time. Some feel irritable or angry. People lose interest in things they used to enjoy and may withdraw from others. Depression can make it hard to focus on tasks and remember information. It can be hard to concentrate, learn new things, or make decisions. Depression can change the way people eat and sleep, and many people experience physical health problems.

Age and sex can also impact how people experience depression. Males often experience anger or irritability rather than sadness, which can make depression harder for others to see. Young people and older adults may experience lasting changes in mood that are mistakenly dismissed as a normal part of growing up or of aging.

## WHAT IS BIPOLAR DISORDER?

Bipolar disorder is another mental illness that affects mood. With bipolar disorder, people experience episodes of depression and episodes of mania. An episode of depression in bipolar disorder is the same as other types of depression. Mania is an unusually high mood for the person. People may feel like their thoughts are racing and may feel hyperactive. They may feel unrealistically confident, happy, or very powerful. Many people don't sleep much when they experience mania. They may act without thinking and do risky things they wouldn't normally do.

People usually experience periods of wellness between episodes of depression or mania. Episodes of depression or mania generally last for a period of time, though a small number of people may experience episodes that change quickly. The frequency and type of episode can also vary greatly. For example, some people experience many episodes of depression with only a few episodes of mania. Others experience long periods of wellness with only a few episodes of depression or mania during their lifetime.

## WHO DO THEY AFFECT?

Depression and bipolar disorder can affect anyone. They are likely caused by many different factors that work together, including family history, biology, the environment, life experiences, personality, and physical health problems.

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Depression and bipolar disorder can be very challenging. Many people blame themselves for their feelings or wonder why they can't just 'get over it.' Some feel like they have to live with difficult feelings because they worry about what others will think if they ask for help. The symptoms of the illnesses themselves can make it hard to seek help. Depression and bipolar disorder are real illnesses, and they deserve care and support. People can and do recover.



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### Counselling and support

A type of counselling called cognitive-behavioural therapy (or 'CBT') is common for mood disorders. It teaches you how your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours work together. It also teaches important skills like solving problems, managing stress, realistic thinking, and relaxation. CBT is often the first treatment to try if you experience mild or moderate problems with depression.

Support groups are also very important. Depression and bipolar disorder can isolate people from others, and isolation can add to mood problems. Support groups are a safe place to share your experiences, learn from others, and connect with people who understand what you're going through.

Taking care of your well-being is especially important if you're working through recovery, but this can be easy to overlook. Regular exercise can boost your mood and help you manage stress. Eating well and learning or maintaining healthy sleep habits are also very helpful. It's always important to spend time on activities you enjoy, find relaxation strategies that work for you, and spend time with loved ones.