

what you

# NEED TO KNOW about...

## Depression

### Amanda's story... Part 1

When I was 15 years old, my mom had an operation. She wasn't able to do the things around the house that she used to. It became my responsibility to clean the house, walk the dogs and make supper. I had a job at the local grocery store. I worked after school until late into the evening. When I got home I'd have so many chores to do that it became hard to keep up with school, homework and my friends. I felt completely overwhelmed. I was getting sick from all the stress. I couldn't eat and I couldn't sleep. I felt like my life was unraveling.

I began skipping classes to see my friends and boyfriend. My grades began dropping. Then I was introduced to drugs. Pretty soon I quit everything: my job, school, chores. My boyfriend broke up with me. My friends stopped wanting to be around me. My dad kicked me out because I wasn't contributing. It was horrible. I felt like a total loser.

I went to stay with my grandparents. Then I started to see a family physician. He told me that it was common at my age to feel like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. He referred me to another doctor, who wasn't so great. I began to feel suicidal. The first person I called was my mom.

### What is depression?

It is normal to feel sad from time to time. But this sadness doesn't stop you from going on with your everyday activities. And it goes away on its own. Depression, on the other hand, is sadness so severe that it interferes with everyday life.

Youth going through a depression often:

- Feel sad, worried, irritable or angry
- Have trouble enjoying anything
- Feel hopeless and worthless
- Have trouble coping with everyday activities at home, school, or work
- Have problems with sleep, energy, appetite and concentration

With severe depression, youth may even hear voices. They may have thoughts of harming themselves or others.

**Depression is more than normal sadness.** A depressed person can't 'just snap out of it'. Studies show there are even physical changes in people's brain chemistry when they are depressed.



## 5 quick facts about depression

**1** You can recover from depression

**2** It's really common

**3** It can happen to anyone

**4** It can change the way you think, feel and act

**5** There are many effective treatments for it

### How common is depression?

Depression is common. Researchers believe that about 1 in 5 people will go through a depression by the time they turn 18.

Studies also tell us that at any one moment, between 4 and 8 out of every 100 children and youth are having a major depression.

Sadly, most people with depression do not get help. **But getting help is important because there are effective treatments. Early treatment can stop depression from coming back in the future.**



### What causes depression?

Depression is usually caused by a few things going on at the same time:

**Family history:** If your parents or other family members have had depression or other emotional problems, there is a greater chance that you will have depression.

**Stress:** Upsetting things in your life. For example:

- Problems with parents, brothers and sisters
- Your parents are really stressed or depressed
- Your parents are separating or divorcing
- Being bullied
- Problems with friends or classmates
- Not doing well in school or feeling pressure to do well
- Someone close to you dies

## What should I do if I think I'm depressed?

If you had a broken arm and were in pain, you'd go to a doctor, right? Instead of causing pain on the outside, depression causes pain on the inside. **You still need to get help for this pain.** Start by talking to your parents, or an adult you trust. You can also talk to friends for support.

Parents or a trusted adult can help you see a doctor. Let the doctor know how you're feeling. A doctor will check for medical problems that could be causing your depression. The doctor may suggest mental health services, and can help you link with psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers or counsellors.

**If you are thinking about hurting yourself, call:**

Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, 902-429-8167 or toll-free, 1-888-429-8167

## Depression treatments at a glance...

Many different treatments are available for depression. They can be used alone or together, depending on what you need. Treatments can work well for some youth, but not for others. All treatments will focus on reducing times of isolation in your life. Your therapist will remind you that it's important to participate in social activities and hobbies you enjoy. Spending too much time at home by yourself is a major risk factor for continued depression. If a treatment isn't working (after giving it a good try), your mental health professional may talk with you about trying something else.

### "Talk Therapy" or Psychotherapy

There are different types of talk therapy, including:



- **Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT):** Helps change the negative, depressive thoughts and behaviours that contribute to depression. It replaces them with more helpful thoughts and behaviours.
- **Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT):** Helps resolve tension and conflict that can contribute to depression.
- **Solution-focused therapy:** Focuses on your strengths. It helps you to focus on what you would like to change in your future, and what you can do to 'get there'.
- **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT):** Focuses on helping you accept the difficulties that come with life. It teaches how to live a value-focused life. ACT also encourages you to reduce avoidant coping styles.

### Medications (antidepressants):



- Are tools that doctors and psychiatrists can use to help ease depression
- Adjust brain chemicals to improve your mood and let you feel a little happier
- Can make it easier for you to take part in talk therapy
- Are not needed by everyone who has depression, but have found to lead to better treatment effects (when combined with therapy) for moderate to severe depression

**Something to Think About!** If you had asthma, would you think it would be better to 'get over it' without treatment?

**Are antidepressants safe?** Some people worry about the safety of antidepressants for youth. Research shows that when used the right way, and monitored by a doctor, antidepressants are safe and effective. Medications must be chosen and adjusted for *each* child or teen (like prescription eye-glasses). Some people have strong views about medications for depression, but a *balanced* look at antidepressant treatment is best. Medications are not all bad, but they may not be needed all the time, either.

## Outpatient and Inpatient Services



Children and youth with depression are usually treated in ‘outpatient’ clinics or community mental health centres. If the depression is severe, you may need more intensive support. This could be from a day/evening program or by staying in hospital.

## Healthy living makes a difference

Taking care of the basics can go a long way toward helping you feel better. A healthy body supports a healthy mind.

Try to:

- **Get enough sleep.** Poor sleep can cause lower mood and energy levels.
- **Eat healthy.** Do your best to eat lots of fruit and veggies. Some early research studies suggest that a lack of Omega 3 fatty acids can make depression worse. (More research is needed in this area - see our fact sheet on Omega 3 fatty acids).
- **Exercise.** You need about an hour a day of physical activity. It’s best to exercise outside in the sun. Aerobic exercise (exercise that increases the heart rate and breathing) can have an anti-depressant effect.
- **See the light!** Lack of sunlight (or vitamin D) can trigger depression in some people who are sensitive to ‘seasonal depression’.
- **Stay away from street drugs and alcohol.** While street drugs can sometimes make you feel better at first, they can cause problems and will soon make things worse.



## Getting better: advice from youth who’ve been there

Youth who have had depression wanted to share their thoughts to help you! Here’s what they said:

- Talking to friends can be really helpful, try to open up to people you trust.
- Depression can feel different for everyone. Youth don’t all have the same symptoms or react to treatments the same way. What works for some people may not work for others. And that’s OK.
- Everyone goes through rough spots. It’s really important to get help if you’re struggling.
- Taking a walk, or any other exercise, can make a big difference.
- Expressing yourself through art, music or writing can help you feel better.
- Yoga and meditation are great ways to relax and focus.
- Create a ‘chill out space’ where you can go to relax and calm yourself. Make it a comfortable place that stimulates your senses: pillows, nice smells, music, play dough to keep your hands busy, gum.

## How to help a friend who is going through depression

Depression might make your friend seem ‘different’. He or she may seem really sad, or even angry. Depression can cause people to be critical of themselves and others. Try to cut your friend some slack. You can help by...

- Just being there, hanging out and doing everyday things.
- Asking if they are OK, letting them know you care.
- Listening when they want to talk.
- Looking for help from a trusted adult if your friend isn’t getting help yet.
- Remembering that you’re a friend, not a therapist. Your friend needs the right kind of depression treatment, and needs to connect with professionals for that.
- Telling a trusted adult if your friend shares thoughts of suicide. Don’t keep this private, even if your friend asks you to. Sometimes you have to ‘tell’ to be a good friend. If friends have thoughts of suicide, they need to talk to someone right away.



## Amanda's story... Part 2

I felt so suicidal. The first person I called was my mom...

She brought me to the emergency room. I was admitted to IWK for a week. Soon my life began turning around. I was back at school and had a new job. I had a boyfriend who loved me and friends who cared about me. I stopped using street drugs and moved back in with my parents.

Now I know that I have depression. I didn't know that it could happen to a 15 year old girl, like me. **But now I'm so much better** because I know what I have. I know how to control it without self-medicating.

What helped me most was learning there are many resources to help people in my situation. I was soon able to find hobbies. They give me the time I need to concentrate on myself. Painting, reading and drawing help me escape. Hobbies are an important part of my week. They keep me from getting over-stressed again.

### Where to find help in Nova Scotia

- In a crisis? Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team, 902-429-8167 or toll-free, 1-888-429-8167
- To Find a Psychologist anywhere in Nova Scotia: Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia, 902-422-9183, [www.apns.ca](http://www.apns.ca)
- Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868, [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)
- Feed Nova Scotia Helpline: 902-421-1188 (within HRM) or, 1-877-521-1188

### Where to find help in Halifax Regional Municipality

- IWK Mental Health & Addictions, offers programs for ages up to 19, 902-464-4110 or toll-free, 1-888-470-5888 (ask to be connected to Central Referral), [www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health](http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca/mental-health)
- Laing House, offers programs for ages 16 to 30 living with a mental illness, 902-425-9018, [www.lainghouse.ca](http://www.lainghouse.ca)
- Capital Health Addictions & Mental Health Program, offers programs for ages 19 and up, [www.cdha.nshealth.ca/addictions-and-mental-health-program](http://www.cdha.nshealth.ca/addictions-and-mental-health-program)

### Support Groups

- Healthy Minds Cooperative, offers resources for peer support, [www.healthyminds.ca](http://www.healthyminds.ca)
- Emotions Anonymous (Dartmouth), peer support for depression, anxiety, anger and suicidal thoughts, 902-866-2523 or 902-469-8809, [www.emotionsanonymous.org](http://www.emotionsanonymous.org)
- Upstairs Kitchen Club (Halifax), peer support for depression or anxiety, 902-471-1422



## Want more information?

### Useful websites

- Anxiety and Depression Association of America, [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)
- Youth Beyond Blue, [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)
- Teen Mental Health, [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)
- Families for Depression Awareness, [www.familyaware.org](http://www.familyaware.org)
- Kelty Mental Health, [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)
- Back from the Bluez handbook from Centre for Clinical Interventions, [www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/consumers.cfm](http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/consumers.cfm)
- Antidepressant Skills for Teens Manual, [www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental\\_health/pdf/dwd\\_writable.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/dwd_writable.pdf)

### Books for Children and Youth

- My Kind of Sad: What It's Like to Be Young and Depressed, Kate Scoran, 2006

**Authors:** Thanks to YouthNet's Youth Advisory Committee (YACers in Ottawa!) for their great ideas and advice for youth. Reviewed by the Mental Health Information Committee at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) and by members of the Child and Youth Mental Health Information Network ([www.cymhin.ca](http://www.cymhin.ca)).

**License:** Under a Creative Commons License. You are free to share, copy and distribute this work as in its entirety, with no alterations. This work may not be used for commercial purposes. Contact the Mental Health Information Committee if you would like to adapt these for your community!

**Disclaimer:** Information in this fact sheet may or may not apply to you. Your health care provider is the best source of information about your health.

Provided by:

### References

Practice parameter for the assessment and treatment of children and adolescents with depressive disorders, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 2007. Retrieved Oct 10, 2007 from [http://www.aacap.org/galleries/PracticeParameters/InPress\\_2007\\_DepressiveDisorders.pdf](http://www.aacap.org/galleries/PracticeParameters/InPress_2007_DepressiveDisorders.pdf) .

Bridge et al.: Clinical response and risk for reported suicidal ideation and suicide attempts in pediatric antidepressant treatment. Journal of the American Medical Association, 2007; 297:1683.1696. Retrieved Oct 10, 2007 from <http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/297/15/1683>.

Mental Health & Addictions Program, IWK Health Centre, Halifax, NS PL-0872 Last Update: 07/15; Next Review: July 2018



902-464-4110 Central Referral  
Fact sheet originally developed by the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, adapted with permission

[www.iwk.nshealth.ca](http://www.iwk.nshealth.ca)

