

Your mood affects how you think about yourself, connect with others, and deal with the world. According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, mood disorders occur when people feel strong, long-lasting, negative emotions that can affect the mind, body, behaviour, and relationships.

Depression is a mood disorder and is common in Huntington disease (HD). Depression is not limited to the person living with HD or a person who is at-risk. Depression could also affect family members and carers.

Individuals with HD may experience depressive symptoms throughout their lifetime. Depression can be related to psychological / life stressors, as well as biological factors.

Psychological/Life Stressors: Depression may be experienced as a reaction to life events like a diagnosis of HD, a changing role within the family, inability to work, loss of a driver's license, a loss of a relationship, and disease progression.

Biological: Mood changes, like depression, may be a result of biological factors happening within a person's body as a result of genes, hormones or changes in the brain.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

Common signs and symptoms of depression may include:

Emotional Symptoms:

1. Feelings of sadness and/or emptiness
2. Loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities
3. Feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and/or guilt
4. Irritability, anxiety, and/or anger

Physical Symptoms:

1. Change in appetite and/or weight gain/loss
2. Change in sleeping patterns (insomnia, early morning awakenings, oversleeping)
3. Headaches, digestive disorders, and/or chronic pain
4. Restlessness and/or change in energy

Cognitive Symptoms:

1. Impaired concentration and thinking
2. Challenges with indecisiveness
3. Lack of motivation, initiative, and/or a desire for social withdrawal
4. Challenges with memory

Thoughts of Suicide

A person experiencing depression may have thoughts of suicide. If you are having thoughts of suicide, please reach out and talk to someone. If you are concerned about suicide risk in someone else, talk with them. Ask them if they have a plan. Take the comments seriously and seek help. Contact your local crisis hotline, take the person to your local emergency room, or call 911.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Depression

Sometimes, the symptoms of HD and depression can look similar. It is important to involve your physician and care team to access the support that you may need. Some common treatment options may include:

- Medications
- Counselling
- Support groups
- Peer support
- Lifestyle changes (exercise, meditation, healthy diet, meaningful activities, avoidance of alcohol and unprescribed drugs)

You Are Not Alone

Seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Reach out to trusted individuals and your local community support services for help.

- Huntington Society of Canada social workers
- Family and friends
- Family doctor and/or HD multidisciplinary care team
- Counsellor
- Mental health organization in your community
- Local Emergency Department

RESOURCES

- Talk Suicide Canada (www.talksuicide.ca) 1-833-456-4566 (24hrs/day)
- Youth and Young Adults: Kids Help Phone (kidshelpphone.ca)
- Indigenous Populations: Hope For Wellness (hopeforwellness.ca)

If you are ready to receive individual or group support from the Huntington Society of Canada, you can self-refer here: <https://contactme.cloud/form/huntingtonsociety>.

Reach out to your local Resource Centre Director (RCD) of the Family Services Program at HSC for ongoing support and education at www.huntingtonsociety.ca/family-services-team-list/

Informational fact sheets for family and friends impacted by HD are available to view, print and download at www.hdfactsheets.ca

Healthcare professionals and caregivers needing a more in depth understanding on caring for someone with HD can find guides at www.huntingtonsociety.ca/hd-booklets-and-publications/

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