

What is Depression?

Depression is characterized by:

- Low mood,
- Reduced interest in most activities,
- Slower movements or restless movements,
- Weight loss or weight gain,
- Sleeping too little or too much,
- Loss of energy or feeling fatigued,
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt,
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, and
- Thoughts about death or self-harm.

These symptoms can appear on their own, or in any combination, and are often serious enough to cause significant distress or impairment in a person's social, occupational, or quality of life.

How are Sleep and Depression Related?

It is important to mention that depression and persistent sleep difficulties often co-exist. In some cases, the depression may be causing the sleep difficulties, and in others the sleep difficulties can be contributing to the depression.

In the case of depression causing the sleep difficulties, depressed people frequently have significant trouble sleeping (called insomnia). Less commonly, people dealing with depression may also sleep too much (called hypersomnia). Both of these problems can significantly contribute to and worsen depression.

Sleep disorders that contribute to depression can substantially affect a person's ability to get restful sleep. This results in daytime fatigue, disruption of normal activities, and impairment in a person's quality of life. Over time, the existing fatigue and associated disruption in one's life can affect the person's mood and lead to depression. Common sleep disorders that may contribute to depression are: insomnia, hypersomnia, sleep apnea, narcolepsy, and periodic limb movement disorder/restless legs syndrome.

Depression and persistent sleep problems can have profound personal, social, and economic consequences for an individual. Some examples of this include: impaired thinking, decreased job performance, negative impact on general health and quality of life, increased incidence of bodily pain, higher absenteeism, impaired social functioning, and increased health care costs.

What is the Treatment for Depression and the Associated Sleep Disorders?

A person should seek help from a health care professional if they suspect they might have depression and/or sleep problems, or if their condition is causing distress, impaired functioning, or a reduction in their quality of life. The assessment involves an in-depth clinical evaluation and, at times, objective laboratory testing. A sleep specialist best provides these services, as they have the necessary expertise to get to the source of the problem, in addition to recognizing, assessing, and treating the various sleep disorders that co-exist with depression.

If laboratory testing is required, the Nocturnal Polysomnogram (PSG) is typically used. The PSG is a night time study that monitors sleep and a person's physiological cues, such as brain wave activity, muscle and eye movements, as well as heart and breathing rates. This testing is critical in evaluating the various sleep disorders that may exist in patients seen with depression, and is also used to exclude other sleep disorders that may be contributing to the disruption of the individual's sleep and/or mood.

There is a strong connection between depression and persistent sleep problems.

The type of treatment required will vary, depending on the cause of a person's sleep difficulty. Treatments can also be combined with one another, as there can be multiple causes of sleep problems associated with depression. Examples of such treatments include:

- **Sleep Hygiene.** This involves developing a set of good sleep habits to obtain quality sleep at night, such as creating a positive sleep environment, establishing a regular sleep schedule, and having a wind-down period before bed.
- **Relaxation and Behaviour Modification.** This includes interventions designed to reduce stress and increase functioning during the day, thereby increasing quality of sleep. This can be used to help manage both depression and sleep difficulties. Some examples include: exercising, participating in pleasurable activities, getting exposure to outdoor sunlight, and abstaining from alcohol use.
- **Medications.** Taking the proper medications for managing depression while trying to minimize sleep difficulties can be an important adjunct to treatment. The decision to take medication to help manage depression and/or sleep difficulties is an individual choice and needs to be made in consultation with a health care provider.
- **Psychotherapy.** This can be beneficial if the underlying cause of a person's sleep difficulty is stress, depression, anxiety, or some other psychological illness. Therapy can be an essential aspect of treatment when overcoming depression.



The Canadian Sleep Institute's 10 Commandments for a better sleep

If getting a better night's sleep is your goal, and underlying medical conditions are not an impediment, you may achieve success by following the Ten Commandments of Sleep Hygiene:

1. Schedule a relaxing period before going to sleep, to separate your body and mind from the day's hassles.
2. Use your bedroom primarily for sex and sleep, and not as an all-purpose activity area.
3. Your bed should be comfortable, large enough, in a quiet, dark room, and at the right temperature.
4. Keep a regular schedule, going to bed and getting up at the same time each day. Don't go to bed until you feel sleepy.
5. Be consistent about taking naps. Take one regularly or not at all.
6. Exercise regularly in the morning or early afternoon, but do not engage in strenuous activity late in the evening. A relaxing, mild physical activity might be helpful close to bedtime.
7. Assess your caffeine intake, and avoid caffeine after 2 p.m. Smoking close to bedtime or at night causes further sleep disruption.
8. Don't use alcohol or drugs, such as sedatives. While they might help you initially fall asleep, they lead to sleep disruption and deprive you of deep sleep (at times, even for years).
9. If you feel hungry in the evening, have a light snack or a glass of milk. Heavy meals close to bedtime can result in discomfort and further sleep disturbance.
10. Above all, do not try too hard. If you can't fall asleep, don't lie in bed anxious and frustrated. Leave your bedroom to read, watch T.V. or do something else to relax, going back to bed only when you feel sleepy again.

- Adam Moscovitch, MD, FRCP (C), ABSM

The Good News:

Sleep specialists are in a position to properly recognize, diagnose, and treat the various sleep disorders that contribute to or are caused by depression. Patients who seek appropriate diagnosis by a qualified sleep specialist can manage their condition(s) and greatly improve their overall quality of life. Our specialists at the Canadian Sleep Institute are experienced and well trained in the treatment of the various sleep disorders, while at the same time meeting the unique needs of the individual. If you feel that you could benefit from seeing a sleep specialist, call us for more information or have your family physician refer you to:

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Canadian Sleep Institute

The Canadian Sleep Institute is a leading centre of excellence in the provision of clinical care, diagnostic services, corporate consulting, clinical research, and education in the area of sleep and fatigue disorders. Our full-service, community-based sleep centre serves a patient population from across Western Canada, and is accredited by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta to assess, diagnose, and treat the full spectrum of over eighty sleep and fatigue disorders.

Our fully qualified team of clinicians, headed by a board-certified sleep physician, is focused on providing comprehensive, coordinated, inter-disciplinary care in the most convenient, accessible, and cost-effective manner available. We feature a state of the art, four-bedroom, overnight sleep diagnostic facility in a comfortable atmosphere and residential hotel-like setting. We also provide a full-service CPAP clinic and follow-up care program for those patients with sleep apnea and related conditions.



Canadian Sleep Institute

Better Health Through Better Sleep

Sleep and Depression

How are *Sleep* and *Depression* related?

Answers to Questions

and information about

Sleep and Depression.

