TREATMENT OPTIONS

With appropriate treatment, more than 80% of people with depression get full relief from their symptoms or at least substantial improvements. And the earlier it’s detected, the more treatable it is. There are a variety of treatment options available, and each depends upon the type and severity of the illness, as well as an individual’s personal characteristics, history, preference, etc.

There are two main types of treatment available: pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical (also referred to as psychological treatment or talk therapy). The two may be used separately, or in combination with one another, depending on the advice of your doctor. However, in the case of bipolar disorder, medication is almost always required.

MEDICATION

Antidepressant medication is commonly used in adults to treat the symptoms of depression. It works by affecting the chemicals, called neurotransmitters, in the brain—restoring them to a healthier balance. Antidepressants can also cause side effects, depending upon the particular medication used. Common side effects can include dry mouth, nausea, nervousness, insomnia, headaches, fatigue, constipation, and weight loss. Children and youth must be closely monitored during their first few months on an antidepressant, as side effects are most likely to occur during this period. If side effects do occur, it is important to consult your doctor before making a change. Suddenly taking your child off antidepressant medication can be dangerous.

There are three main types of antidepressants:
- Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)
- Tricyclics
- Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors (MAOIs)

Each type affects the brain’s chemical balance slightly differently.

Antidepressants may work for some kids, but not all. Research indicates that tricyclics and MAOIs are generally not effective in young people. Questions have recently been raised about the effectiveness of SSRIs, which include such drugs as Zoloft and Paxil. In many research studies, SSRIs other than Prozac were no more effective than a placebo or sugar pill. Furthermore, these drugs have been found to have possible adverse effects on teens, including side effects such as agitation and suicidal thoughts. In 2004, Health Canada requested new warning labels for these medications addressing these side effects. In BC, an estimated 6,200 children and youth were prescribed SSRIs in 2002, more than double the number four years earlier.
PSYCHOTHERAPY

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a scientifically established psychotherapy that has been shown to be very effective in treating depression in children and youth. CBT uses a structured approach that works by modifying behaviours and cognitions (thoughts) in order to break negative thought and self-defeating patterns that may be contributing to the depression. CBT teaches more effective ways of coping with difficult situations and can work both as prevention and treatment. Training and certification in evidence-based non-pharmacological treatments such as CBT is currently being made available to all clinicians working in Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health teams.

Interpersonal Psychotherapy
Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT) is a structured manual-based psychotherapy that addresses interpersonal issues in depression. It applies many of the same principles as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, but focuses on interpersonal or social relationships. IPT addresses one or more of the following areas:

- Interpersonal Disputes
- Role Transitions
- Grief
- Interpersonal Deficits

Less common than CBT, interpersonal therapy emphasizes the development of skills to improve key social relationships and interactions. Research has shown that interpersonal psychotherapy can be very effective for youth with depression.
FAQ: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT TREATMENT OPTIONS

How can I get treatment?
In British Columbia, the mental health service system for children and youth includes a range of options. Services are offered throughout the province by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, both directly as well as through partnerships with community organizations, schools, medical facilities, doctors and others.

If you know your child needs treatment, you can take him or her directly to one of these offices. He or she will then go through a screening and intake process to determine appropriate treatment and referral. In some areas of the province, a wait for Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health services may occur. All new referrals are screened for severity and urgent cases are seen first.

If you aren’t sure whether you need treatment, or where to start, go to your family doctor or local clinic. Physicians are trained in the assessment and diagnosis of depression and can treat it directly or refer your child to an appropriate specialist if necessary. You may also wish to consult a school counsellor as a first step in getting help.

What kind of specialist should my child see?
The type of doctor you see will depend on the severity of the disorder and required treatment. Below are some basic definitions of the different kinds of specialists. Your family doctor or the Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health teams can help assess your needs more specifically.

_**Psychiatrist**_
Psychiatrists are medical specialists trained to treat people with mental health disorders. They often use medication as the primary form of treatment but may employ non-drug therapies as well. Patients with severe depressive conditions and bipolar disorder would likely be referred to a psychiatrist through their family doctor.

_**Psychologist**_
Psychologists typically provide counselling and psychotherapy, and administer and interpret psychological assessment tests. Psychologists are not medical doctors and do not prescribe medication. They have advanced training (typically a Ph.D.) in clinical psychology and are licensed practitioners through the College of Psychologists of BC.

_**Psychiatric Nurse**_
Psychiatric nurses work with people to assess mental health needs, develop nursing diagnoses and care plans, and monitor treatment. At an advanced level, psychiatric nurses with master’s degrees in mental health nursing provide a full range of services to treat mental health disorders.

_**Clinical Social Worker**_
Clinical social workers provide assessment and treatment of mental, emotional and behavioural disorders and conditions. They can provide psychosocial interventions to enhance personal, interpersonal and social functioning. A clinical social worker typically holds a master’s degree in social work.
What is the cost of treatment?
Visits to your family doctor and Ministry of Children and Family Development child and youth mental health teams (which include psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, counsellors and nurses) are funded by the provincial government and there is no cost to the patient or his or her family. Not all of these mental health clinicians are available in every community, however. Some communities have all four disciplines represented, whereas others have only one or two. Treatment by privately practicing specialists such as psychologists, therapists and counsellors may be covered under personal extended health care plans. Workplace employee assistance programs will often pay for some sessions, so check with your insurance provider for details. The cost will depend on the course of treatment required and the length of time treatment is underway.

For more info, contact:

College of Psychologists of BC
http://www.collegeofpsychologists.bc.ca

Board of Registration for Social Workers of BC
http://www.brsw.bc.ca

Registered Nurses Association of BC
http://www.rnabc.bc.ca

What is a day treatment program?
A day treatment program can be a very effective solution for young people with recurring or more severe depression who require daily support and care. It is community-based and encompasses schooling and therapeutic support five days per week.

When is hospital treatment required?
Hospital inpatient treatment is generally only required in very severe cases—if the child or youth is suicidal or suffering psychotic episodes. The large majority of children and youth suffering from depression do not require hospital treatment.

Hospital beds can be limited and wards are not always very child or youth-friendly. In Kelowna, a campaign is currently underway to raise funds for the construction of an adolescent psychiatry wing.
For more info, go to: www.180-degrees.ca

How long is medication required?
The length of time medication is required will depend upon the severity of the disorder. Sometimes it is required indefinitely, however dosages can be reduced over time. Suddenly stopping medication can be dangerous—causing side effects or enabling the illness to return—so be sure to consult your doctor before initiating changes.
What school-based prevention programs are available in BC?

FRIENDS
The Province of BC, through the Ministry of Children and Family Development and its Mental Health Plan, is implementing a province-wide program called FRIENDS, an early intervention and prevention program developed in Australia in 1998. Teachers, school counsellors, special educators and child and youth mental health clinicians are being trained to deliver the program to Grade 4 and 5 students in an effort to reduce the development of anxiety disorders, the most common mental health problem in children. While the primary focus of FRIENDS is the prevention of anxiety, the program also aims to promote self-esteem, problem-solving skills, psychological resilience and positive relationships with peers, all of which can contribute to a more positive mood.