

# Empowering the Citizen Patient

Actionable Tips, Information & Resources to Support  
Your Health & Health Care

## Article #5

Healthy People, Healthy Communities  
Taking a Closer Look at Supporting Our  
Psychological Well-Being



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*In this article of our monthly "Empowering the Citizen Patient" series, Dr. Mindy Smith, retired family physician and active member of the Kootenay Boundary Patient Advisory Committee, shares her expertise, tips and resources for supporting people who are affected by depression and/or anxiety. Join us as we continue our journey to empower both patients and those who care for them.*

Mental health is a hot topic these days – from television, radio, to social media and kitchen table conversations. This surge in awareness is partly due to the opioid epidemic, the many crises our world faces, and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health encompasses our emotions, feelings of connection to others, past trauma, our thoughts about ourselves and our ability to manage life's ups and downs. Our mental health affects how we think, feel and act.

## What you need to know

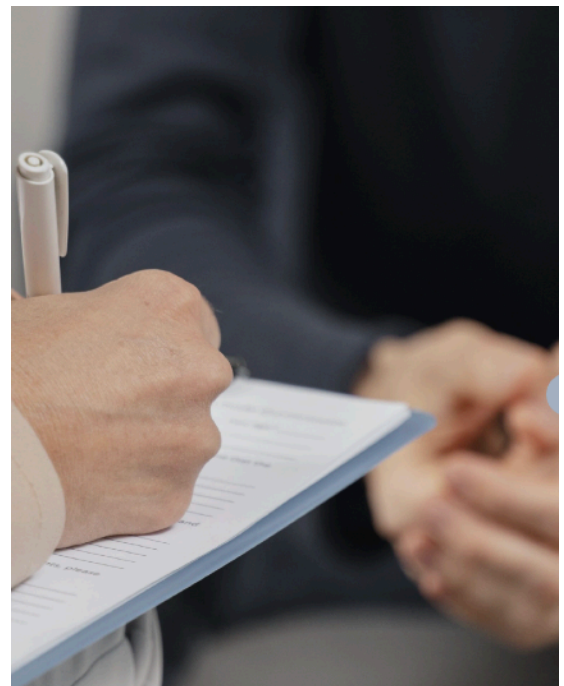
Over 5 million Canadians were affected by a mood or substance use disorder in 2022 according to Statistics Canada. The most important thing to know is that mood disorders are treatable, and they are not something to be ashamed of. Getting help is the first step.

There is a very wide range of mental health disorders. For this article, I'm focusing on mood disorders like depression and anxiety, which are among the most prevalent and affect 5.4% and 4.6% of Canadians, respectively. It's important to recognize that while occasional feelings of sadness or worry are normal, mood disorders interfere with our ability to function in our day-to-day lives.

A patient of mine shared, "During periods of anxiety or depression, I find it challenging to go about my day. Simple tasks become overwhelming."

One of the ways we can learn more about ourselves is by considering these questions:

- In the past month, have I felt down or depressed or hopeless?
- Have I been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?



If the answers are yes, you may be suffering from depression.

- Am I a worrier?
- Do I find it difficult to control worry once it starts?

If yes, you may be suffering from anxiety.

## Where to find more information about mood disorders

A tool that family practitioners use to assess depression is the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9). Similarly, for anxiety, one tool that can help identify an anxiety disorder is the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7. See the [kbpacc.ca](http://kbpacc.ca) website and HealthLink BC (<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/health-topics>) for information and links to education about mood disorders and mental health.

"I still remember how important it was to have a close friend come to appointments with me years ago when I had my cancer diagnosis.

With the emotional stress and need to act quickly, it was hard to remember all the information, recommendations and plans. My friend provided emotional support and also took notes and asked questions so we didn't miss crucial details." – *Ruth Beck, Nelson*



## What to Do?

There are some things you can do in your daily life to reduce symptoms of depression or anxiety including talking to friends and loved ones, getting daily exercise and trying relaxation exercises, meditation, mindfulness or massage therapy, and creating routines and actions that help us feel better. Avoiding alcohol and recreational drugs is helpful as these can worsen negative feelings. For anxiety, try to avoid caffeine (e.g., coffee, soft drinks, chocolate), smoking cigarettes, and diet pills as these can make your anxiety worse.

Professional support is available to help treat mood disorders. The main treatments include counseling and prescription medication. Most guidelines recommend starting with counseling. Types of therapy that are effective for mood disorders include psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and behavioral activation therapy.

You can find local counseling help online at [KB FETCH](#), including the Healing our Spirits: Aboriginal Mental Health and Substance Use Program; on the Interior Health website; or through the [BC government website](#). For some Indigenous persons, your benefits plan covers counseling from a qualified mental health provider, travel assistance if needed, and support services for indigenous persons affected by Indian Day School or Residential School survivors, family members and others affected by missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women in Canada (visit [fnha.ca](#) or call 1-855-550-5454 or contact an aboriginal health coordinator for help: <https://coinations.net/referral-form-for-aboriginal-health-coordinator/>).

## What other help is available?

In severe cases of depression and anxiety, family practitioners often prescribe antidepressants. Different antidepressants work similarly well, so make sure to talk about side effects to find the best one for you. It's important to note that sometimes the first medicine doesn't always work; up to 50% of people might need to try a different one if there's no improvement after 1-2 months. Also worth noting is that in studies of over-the-counter drugs, they have not been shown to consistently help with mood disorders.

For anyone experiencing severe symptoms including hallucinations (thoughts of seeing, feeling, smelling or hearing something that isn't there), or delusions (a false belief about something despite strong evidence that it is not true), or suicidal thoughts, immediate help is available 24/7 by calling 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433), KUU-US Aboriginal crisis line: 1-800-588-8717 (24 hours), or 310-6789 (24 hours) or go to your nearest emergency department.

This article only provides a small glimpse into the growing science about mental health, specifically highlighting mood disorders such as depression and anxiety. Stigma and discrimination are real issues for people living with mood disorder and mental health challenges, but know that you are not alone, and remember that these challenges are treatable, so please reach out for help.



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