

Best Doctors® REPORT

Winter 2017

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Best Doctors is here for you and your family

A word from Best Doctors

Persistently feeling down during winter's bitter cold and grey skies may be something far more serious than it seems. Seasonal affective disorder – aptly referred to as SAD – affects many Canadians, and it can have a real impact on a person's mental health.

Getting help and seeking appropriate guidance is important, just as it is when dealing with other health issues, such as common, but serious chronic diseases, like cancer, heart disease and Alzheimer's disease.

As the first and second leading causes of death in Canada, respectively, cancer and heart disease deserve our year-round attention, while rising rates of Alzheimer's and other dementias make these important health concerns for all Canadians as well. The impact of these diseases isn't only experienced by the afflicted individual—there is also a toll on family members, caregivers, workplaces and the economy.

This is why it's crucial to do what we can to reduce our risks, ensure we have the right diagnoses and seek appropriate treatment and care. Only by asking the right questions and getting the right answers can we advocate properly for our health, so we can enjoy as many sunny, healthy days as possible.

Member story: Glyne and Michele



Glyne was recently diagnosed with leukemia. He and his wife, Michele, were unsure of where to turn and decided to contact Best Doctors. Best Doctors sent their initial questions about medication to an expert oncologist, who's clear and informative answers allowed them to choose the most effective treatment.

Concurrently, Best Doctors collected all of Glyne's relevant medical records and sent them to a physician for an expert second opinion. The expert confirmed Glyne's diagnosis of leukemia and his treatment.

Glyne started experiencing severe side effects, but neither his general practitioner or his oncologist could help him. They contacted Best Doctors again to help them find a new oncologist that specialized in his type of leukemia, and after getting a referral from his GP, the new oncologist called him and said he could see Glyne the very next day.

Glyne's new treating physician saw him weekly to manage his side effects and even referred him to a counsellor who specialized in patients with cancer. Glyne went into remission, and after experiencing a few different services, Michele and Glyne both said they would highly recommend Best Doctors.

"Best Doctors lived up to everything they said they would do," said Michele. "Everything was so fast and so thorough with Best Doctors and the doctor they recommended to us was incredible."

Feeling SAD: Understanding seasonal affective disorder

With the coldest months upon us and the number of daylight hours at an all-time low, we may find ourselves afflicted by the “winter blues.” While it may be normal to feel like hibernating on days when the mercury dips well below zero, it’s important to be able to differentiate between a mild case of the blues and something more serious.

Seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, is a type of depression related to the change in seasons. It typically begins in the fall as the days become shorter and lasts throughout the winter. While it isn’t clear what exactly causes SAD, it’s believed that winter SAD is related to a lack of sunlight. People with seasonal affective disorder make up about 10 per cent of all depression cases.¹

Identifying SAD

You may want to speak with your doctor if you are experiencing any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty getting sleep at night, or feeling like sleeping all the time.
- Trouble carrying out daily tasks.
- Changes in appetite (and craving sugary or starchy foods).
- Feeling hopeless, guilty or irritable or avoiding people or activities that you typically enjoy.

What to do

SAD can have a serious impact on your life, and it’s important to get help if you or a loved one is



experiencing this form of depression. Here are some common treatments for seasonal affective disorder:

- **Counselling:** Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can be effective for treating depression. A health professional who uses CBT can help you break the negative patterns of depression.
- **Medication:** Be sure to speak to your doctor to find out if medication is the best treatment for your symptoms, and if which is right for you.
- **Self-help:** Getting regular exercise, maintaining a healthy diet and getting enough sleep, coupled with managing stress levels and maintaining personal connections can help reduce symptoms of depression, particularly for more mild forms of SAD.

If you think you have SAD, it’s important to visit your doctor and avoid self-diagnosing. Your doctor can rule out other possible causes for your symptoms, such as thyroid problems or other types of depression, while helping you find the best form of treatment.



Nine in 10 Canadians over the age of 20 have at least one risk factor for heart disease. **Four in 10** have three or more risk factors.²



Lung cancer is the **most common** type of cancer, followed by breast cancer and colorectal cancer.³



Canada ranks **12th** among the top 50 countries with the highest cancer rates.³



The annual cost of caring for those living with dementia is **\$10.4 billion** (health care system costs and out-of-pocket caregiver costs).⁴

Preventing heart disease: Small steps equal big gains

The statistics are alarming: More than 1.6 million Canadians report having heart disease, making it the second leading cause of death in Canada.² But understanding the risk factors that contribute to heart disease and making appropriate lifestyle changes can go a long way towards helping prevent it.

Not all risk factors can be controlled, such as family history (the risk is higher if any immediate family members have had a heart attack, high cholesterol or high blood pressure) and age (risk of heart disease increases with age). However, some can be.

“More than **1.6 million Canadians** report having heart disease, making it the **second leading** cause of death in Canada.”

Controllable risk factors

- Smoking, which contributes to blocked arteries.
- Unhealthy diet (foods high in trans fats, saturated fats and sodium) and lack of exercise
- High stress levels may result in high cholesterol, increased blood pressure or heart rhythm disturbances.

Reduce your risk

Adopting a healthier lifestyle will go a long way towards reducing your risk of developing heart disease. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Speak to your family doctor to identify your risk factors. Early detection and treatment of high cholesterol, high blood pressure and diabetes can greatly reduce your risk of heart disease.
- If you're a smoker, you should quit. If you live a sedentary lifestyle, start an exercise regimen.
- Adopt healthy eating habits by including fresh fruits and vegetables in your diet while avoiding trans fat and limiting saturated fats and sodium.
- Adopt positive stress management techniques.

Cancer in the workplace

February 4, 2017 marks World Cancer Day, an annual event that shines the spotlight on a disease that claims 8.2 million lives worldwide every year.⁵ In Canada alone, it's estimated there were more than 200,000 new cases of cancer in 2016.⁶ Although cancer is the leading cause of death in Canada, survival rates are on the rise: The five-year survival rate is 82.5 per cent, the third highest in the world.

However, cancer is hard on everyone, especially when you consider that 30 per cent of new cases occur between the ages of 20 and 59—prime employment years.⁷ These demographics mean that a significant number of cancer patients will continue to work either while battling their illness or after treatment and recovery. In fact, the majority of cancer survivors return to work one year after a diagnosis.⁷

This raises an important question: What can employees and employers do to facilitate the successful re-integration of a worker impacted by cancer?

Considerations for employees

- Before returning to work, assess your skills, including your physical and cognitive abilities, or have a professional assess them. This will help you determine the challenges you may face upon returning to work.
- Consider strategies to improve your work abilities, such as managing fatigue, exercising regularly and accessing rehabilitation and counselling support.
- Develop a formal return-to-work plan and manage expectations at your workplace.

Considerations for employers

- Implementing effective work accommodations is important to help facilitate a successful return to work experience for a cancer survivor. This includes employer flexibility with respect to work hours and duties, such as reducing any physical tasks.
- A positive social climate and support from co-workers will help foster work engagement for employees living with cancer.
- Paid time for medical appointments and a reduction in work hours will result in better return to work outcomes for cancer survivors.
- A gradual return to work can help facilitate a positive transition back into the workplace.

[5] World Cancer Day; Union for International Cancer Control

[6] Canadian Cancer Society

[7] The Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology

[8] Alzheimer's Association of Canada

The costs of Alzheimer's disease and dementia

"There are countless considerations we have to think about as we or our loved ones settle into old age. Two major considerations are how our health and financial circumstances will change, and in most cases, these two issues are closely intertwined.

Over 747,000 Canadians are living with Alzheimer's or another dementia.⁸ A diagnosis of dementia is life-changing for both the individual and their family and friends, taking a huge personal and financial toll.

The monetary costs of Alzheimer's and dementia

- Home care and long-term care costs – the costs for those with dementia are estimated to be over five times greater than for those who are dementia-free.⁴
- Long-term care costs for those living with dementia are estimated to be \$14,000 per person per year.⁴
- Unpaid care is common. In 2011, family caregivers provided 19.2 million unpaid hours of care. This number is projected to double by 2031.⁴

The personal costs of Alzheimer's and dementia

- Memory loss, trouble completing tasks that were once easy, difficulty solving problems and visual changes, such as difficulty understanding images.
- Changes in mood or personality, withdrawing from family and friends.
- Intensified care needs ultimately leading to a need for round-the-clock assistance.

Getting help

Although treatments aren't available to stop or slow the brain damage caused by dementia, medications may temporarily help improve symptoms. Because these conditions impact behaviour, behavioural interventions can also make a difference in improving the quality of life.

Having proper support systems in place is crucial for both the affected individual and for caregivers. For those who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia, helpful resources include counselling services, programs and support groups. There are also many resources available to family members and caregivers to learn what to expect and how to respond during the early, middle and late stages of the disease.

How Best Doctors can help

Best Doctors can solve any medical uncertainty for you or a loved one. Whether you need help figuring out treatment options for seasonal affective disorder, you are trying to locate a Alzheimer's support group or would like an expert second opinion regarding a cancer diagnosis, Best Doctors can help.

Best Doctors offers a full spectrum of services to help you navigate the health care system, find the right specialist, get an expert second opinion or ask questions about any medical condition.

Through Best Doctors' Gallup®-certified polling process, we identify the world's top medical experts in over 450 specialties and subspecialties of medicine. These experts, along with the Best Doctors staff, can guide you in the right direction to ensure you're getting the best care possible, allowing you take control of your health care.

No matter what health care dilemma you're facing, Best Doctors gives you peace of mind and provides reassurance that you're not facing any medical situation alone.



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53,000 medical experts on call for you

When you're facing an uncertain medical situation, call Best Doctors. We can solve any medical issues – no matter they're complexity – to ensure you get the right information, the right diagnosis and the right treatment.