

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is a nation-wide, charitable organization that promotes the mental health of all and supports the resilience and recovery of people experiencing mental illness. For more information about the CMHA and our services, please go to www.cmha.ca

Getting Help



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You're strong, right? You don't need any help. No matter what comes along, you have "what it takes" to handle it yourself. A terrible accident, the death of someone you love, divorce, loss of a job, financial ruin – whatever – you take it all in your stride. Don't show your feelings. Don't confide in anyone because they might think you are weak. Keep a "stiff upper lip" and above all, keep going.

Sound familiar? What happens if you can't keep going anymore?

What happens if:

- You are so angry or so sad that you are unable to cope with day-to-day life?
- Your physical health is suffering and every day you feel like your body is letting you down?
- You don't know which way to turn, and like a deer caught in the headlights, you are unable to move?

- Life seems so much better through the bottom of a bottle or with the help of drugs?
- You are constantly fighting with your spouse, or you have pulled back from your relationship with your partner?
- There is no joy left in life?
- Death seems like a better option than life?

If any of these have a familiar ring, maybe it's time to think about what personal strength really means. Inner strength is not about making your way through life all by yourself. It is about falling down and getting back up, and knowing when you need help to do that.

You wouldn't try to climb a mountain without a team of people backing you up; life is the same way. We need others to help us get up the steep slopes and scale the heights.

Find Your Backup Team

The first steps are always the toughest, but knowing where to look for help is a good start.

Here are some places where you can begin to build your team:

- Talk to your family doctor. She is a great resource and can link you to other professionals, if needed.
- Check out community mental health clinics or contact organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) for information.
- Go online and find out about reputable, confidential mental health resources. Many

provincial governments or community agencies across Canada offer anonymous telephone or web chat services.

- Get out books, videos and audio books on mental well-being and mental illness from your library. Go to a store and buy books on the topic. Be an informed consumer.
- Attend workshops and education sessions hosted in community centres, agencies, schools, colleges and universities.
- If you belong to a church, talk with a member of your clergy.
- Don't forget your friends and family. They love you; share your feelings with them and let them be part of your team.

Members of the Team

When you build an effective team, you need to have the right skill mix to achieve success. Regaining mental health is no different. You need to have the right team members to make the climb back to health.

Family Doctor

Regard your family physician as your project coordinator. She works with you to assess your needs, plan a course of action, select other team members and monitor progress. She can't scale the mountain for you, but she can make all the difference in preparing you for the climb.

Psychologist

Sometimes you want additional skills to help with your recovery. A psychologist is a mental

health professional with a master's or a doctoral degree in psychology that takes six to ten years of university study. Psychologists with a doctoral degree can use the title, "Dr." but because he is not a medical doctor he cannot prescribe medications. However a psychologist is specially trained in the use of counseling or other methods. You do not need a physician referral to go to a psychologist; you can "self-refer."

Psychologist's fees are not covered under all provincial health plans. Be sure to check about coverage in your area, or speak with your private insurance company to see if they cover the cost of consultations.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor with a specialty in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. She can prescribe medication as well as use psychotherapy to relieve mental disease. Psychiatrist's fees are covered by provincial health plans.

Other Mental Health Professionals

There are many different mental health professionals who can assist you with your recovery process. In fact, your family doctor may suggest you team up with other therapists such as a nurse or social worker who have specialized training in mental health. The fees for some of these therapists may not be covered by your provincial health plan, so inquire about costs and coverage when arranging for your appointment.

Community Health Organizations

Community mental health organizations, such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), offer many different programmes that could also be of benefit to you. Check with one in your area and inquire as to the services that are available. For contact information, visit our website at www.cmha.ca

Self-Help Groups

Getting together with people who are dealing with the same issues as you, offers a safe environment in which to share perspectives and strategies. You discover you are not alone, and your troubles are not impossible to overcome. Gradually you realize that others share many of the same burdens as you, and step by step you all overcome the obstacles together.

Contact a CMHA branch near you, or any other community mental health agency, to obtain information on a self-help group close to you. You can also get information about national organizations that are relevant to your situation and from there, connect with newsletters, bulletins and events in your area.

Other Community Services

Sometimes we need a leg up with day-to-day activities that feel too overwhelming to face. Things like housekeeping, meal preparation and driving to appointments can be too much to handle when you are already feeling burdened.

There are community organizations that can help – whether it is practical help, home nursing, Meals on Wheels or subsidized door-to-door transportation, there are options available that can assist you. Your local Community Care and the Community Care Access Centre are two excellent examples of agencies that work hard to provide these kinds of home services. Some services are fee-based and may depend on certain criteria; check about costs when you call.

If you are not sure who to call, contact a CMHA branch near you to find out what agencies are in your area.

Ready for the Peak?

Recovering from a mental illness is like preparing for a mountain climb. At first, the peak seems remote and unattainable. However, when you break it down into a series of small steps, even the steepest slope becomes manageable.

Take the first steps by finding out what help is available, gathering your team, sharing the burdens and then commencing the climb. As you move forward, you will find that the journey becomes easier. There will be times when obstacles get in the way, but with the help of your team, you can overcome them.

If you need help in taking those first and subsequent steps, contact a Canadian Mental Health Association branch near you, or go to www.cmha.ca for more information.