



Summer Depression: Triggers, Symptoms, and Getting Help

by Trish Stephens, MA, Registered Psychotherapist (Qual.)

Did you know that summertime can act as a trigger for depression?

While many people associate a downturn in mood to the darker and colder winter months, about 10% of those affected by Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) are triggered during the summer months. For many people, their symptoms of depression appear or worsen from about April to September in Canada, and this worsening of symptoms can be attributed to several summer-specific events.

Summer is a time when many people's regular schedules are disrupted. Vacations occur. Kids are off school. Co-workers go on holidays (potentially leaving more work for you to tackle). ***All these things can cause disruption in sleep patterns, eating habits, and your general daily routine.*** For many, a disruption in routine can trigger a depressive episode.

Financial strain can also occur during the summer months. Summer camps, vacations, tax installments, housing projects, new summer clothes, you name it; all of these things can add stress to the pockets. Stress to the pockets can cause stress to the mind, and stress of the mind can cause symptoms of depression.

When warmer weather comes, big sweaters and warm jackets usually get swapped for t-shirts and lighter pants or shorts. For many, summer is a time to go swimming at the pool or to the beach. These situations can present unique challenges for anyone who struggles with body image. To make matters worse, the constant barrage of magazine covers and social media articles about how to get the "beach body of your dreams" can trigger feelings of inadequacy for just about all of us. The pressure of wanting to "look good" (whatever that means) can trigger signs of depression for many, including sadness, hopelessness, frustration, restlessness and a loss of interest in your hobbies, work, and/or relationships.



Isolation is also a common feeling that can creep up during these months, especially because for many, the summer brings along the thoughts that "I SHOULD be having a good time...." or "Everyone else is having fun, why aren't I?" ***The problem with these thoughts is that it puts undue pressure on your psyche. If you are already feeling down, the added stress of guilt or shame can be more than enough to launch you into a depression.***

The good news is that there are several things you can do to try to combat symptoms of depression during the summer.

First and foremost, talk to a friend, a relative, or a counsellor about your struggles. ***Speaking with anyone who you trust to support you is often the first step in feeling better.*** Getting outdoors can also be helpful to many, whether it is heading out for a relaxing stroll, sitting by a lake, taking a hike out in nature, or doing something new and adventurous like rock climbing. The outdoors is a therapeutic place for many as it seems to be easier to relax, take deeper breaths, and lose yourself when you are out in nature. Lastly, try to stop any automatic thoughts where you compare yourself to others. Try to do daily check-ins where you monitor how often you are thinking about what others are doing. If you catch yourself ruminating on the subject, distract your mind: watch a movie, read a book, or do a puzzle. The most important thing is that you are doing what makes YOU feel the best. After all, taking care of yourself is the absolute best selfish thing you can do.

Are you experiencing symptoms of depression?

You're not alone and we can help.

Contact the Collaborative Care Centre at Heritage Fitness today to book an appointment with one of our counsellors.

