

Is systematic screening for depression with questionnaires in primary care beneficial?

Depression has a negative effect on people’s emotions, thoughts and well-being.



Screening for depression in adults

The Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care recommends against routine screening for depression using standardized tools, such as questionnaires with a cut off, in all adults aged 18+.



 This guideline applies to adults at normal and higher risk of depression (e.g. childhood trauma, family history)

 Why?

- The evidence shows that screening every adult for depression with a questionnaire has little or no effect on health

 This guideline is not for adults with:

- A history of depression
- Current depression
- Symptoms of depression or other mental health disorder

What does this mean for clinicians?

Ask patients about their mental health and well-being as part of usual care

Practice good clinical judgement to detect potential depression

Don’t use a standardized tool to screen every patient

Be vigilant for depression

Use clinical judgment to decide on further steps



Usual care vs. screening for depression



Usual care

- Asks about mental health and well-being regularly
- Conversation-based
- Questions asked in usual care are not screening



Screening

- Uses a medical test or tool (e.g. questionnaire with cut off score) to find people at risk of a disease or health problem
- Is done with every adult
- Is for people without symptoms



Depression facts

- Lifetime prevalence: 10% in people without bipolar disorders
- Depression has increased in Canadians aged 15 + since 2012
- People with childhood trauma, chronic disease, who are Indigenous, LGBTQ2+ or with substance use disorders at higher risk
- Depression is often diagnosed, managed, and treated in primary care



Takeaway:

- Be vigilant and ask about the mental health of patients regularly
- Don’t use a questionnaire with a cutoff score to detect depression
- Use all clinical information to make a mental health assessment

Mental health resources

- [988 Suicide Crisis Helpline](#)
- Canada.ca Mental health support: [Get help](#)
- [Quebec mental health \(Santé mentale\)](#)

