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## PREVENTIVE HEALTH

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### THE RESILIENCE ISSUE

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# FLU SEASON AND COVID-19: YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED



When the COVID-19 pandemic began, most Canadians turned their lives upside down overnight in order to protect our loved ones and our communities. Our efforts have made a big difference – but we're not out of the woods yet.

Experts expect that the recent climb in COVID-19 cases across the country may create a "double wave": a simultaneous combination of COVID-19 and our annual flu season.

Medical experts and health officials are working around the clock to prepare for this, but Canadians are understandably worried and looking for answers.

We asked Dr. Dominik Nowak, Physician Lead for the TELUS Medical Advisory Council and Faculty at the University of Toronto, to answer your most common questions about flu season and COVID-19.



**1) If I have cold-like symptoms, how will I know if I have the flu or COVID-19?**

Influenza (the flu) and COVID-19 are alike in that they're both contagious respiratory illnesses, but they are caused by different viruses. Especially early on, both can show up with identical symptoms, which can include fever, cough, difficulty breathing, sore throat, tiredness, and a stuffy nose. Testing is one way to help tell them apart. The bottom line is, if you develop any symptoms, no matter how mild, you must isolate and connect with your local health system to seek out any appropriate testing and contact tracing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has compiled this helpful resource that compares COVID-19 and the flu, based on the best information we have to date. We know, for instance, that it often takes a few days after exposure for someone to develop symptoms from the COVID-19 virus. Until then, people can be contagious without knowing it, which is why it's so important to keep our "social bubbles" small, and be diligently-distanced with interactions outside our bubbles - in addition to wearing a mask and practicing hand hygiene.

**2) Is COVID-19 more deadly than the flu?**

COVID-19 is thought to be around ten times as deadly as the regular flu. That said, both can cause serious illness and death, and we know that the flu kills hundreds of thousands of people globally every year.

Each country's death rate from COVID-19 differs in part based on who gets the virus in that country: although healthy people can get infected by both the flu and COVID-19 viruses, older adults, people with pre-existing medical conditions, and those with compromised immune systems are the most vulnerable to severe disease from either. Tragically, eight out of every ten COVID-19 deaths in Canada have been in long-term care homes (double the OECD average). And while anyone can get seriously ill, we can all transmit both the flu and COVID-19 to others. This is why it is so important we stay diligent through the coming months.

**3) I am taking so many extra safety measures and my exposure to others is limited. Do I really need the flu vaccine this year?**

The flu vaccine protects us and those around us. The looming threat of a winter "double wave" also means a shared duty for all Canadians to be proactive about influenza, our usual winter epidemic. Although the flu is less deadly than the COVID-19 virus on a case fatality basis, both are serious. I have cared for many people who ultimately died or had serious harm from influenza.

However Fall and Winter progress, we cannot afford to have both COVID-19 and influenza epidemic waves rolling through our communities at the same time. Flu vaccination helps reduce risk of hospitalization and death. It will be crucial

for all Canadians who can to immunize, in order to protect themselves and their loved ones. It's more important this year than ever to get your flu vaccine.

**4) Should I be worried about side effects from the flu vaccine?**

No. Most people have very mild or no side effects from getting the flu vaccine, and severe reactions are very rare. It is safe for kids, adults, older adults and pregnant women to get vaccinated, and you cannot get the flu from the flu vaccine. If you have questions about potential side effects given your personal medical history, start a virtual consultation with a practitioner on your [\*\*Akira by TELUS Health app\*\*](#), or consult your primary care professional.

**5) Will the flu vaccine protect me, even partially, against COVID-19?**

No. Getting the flu vaccine does not provide protection against the COVID-19 virus because it is designed specifically to protect against flu viruses. Each year, the vaccine is tailored to prevent against the circulating strains of influenza for that particular year. Getting your vaccine this Fall will significantly decrease your risk of getting the flu, help lower your risk of severe illness and hospitalization, and protect your loved ones and community.

**6) Will getting the flu vaccine increase my risk of getting COVID-19?**

No. A claim that people who get the flu vaccine are more likely to get COVID-19 has been spreading via social media, but there is no reason to believe that the flu vaccine will increase your risk of getting infected with the COVID-19 virus.

**7) I used to get the flu vaccine at the office. How can I get it this year?**

The flu vaccine will still be widely available in Canada this year. Contact your primary care professional or log on to your [\*\*Akira by TELUS Health app\*\*](#) for help locating the closest flu clinic locations near you.

**8) If I have flu or COVID-19 symptoms – can I still get the flu vaccine?**

No. Flu vaccination should be postponed for anyone with a possible, probable, or confirmed case of COVID-19, or for anyone who is unwell. Mild illness is not usually a contraindication to flu vaccination, but you should wait until you are symptom-free and beyond any recommended self-isolation period to get the vaccine to avoid exposing healthcare workers and other patients to the COVID-19 virus.

It is also important to know that a previously suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19 or flu does not protect you from future flu infections. The best way to protect yourself from seasonal flu is to get vaccinated annually, as the circulating strains of flu change each year.





# RESILIENCE: BEND, DON'T BREAK

By Ryan Ghorayeb and Dr. Mary Ross, Copeman Healthcare



It might be helpful to approach the stress of 2020 by acting like rubber. When pressure is applied to rubber, it bends, but doesn't break!

Rubber's ability to bend is called resiliency, and resiliency is not only a property of materials, but a key psychological trait that helps us deal with adversity.

## What is resilience, and why is it important?

Resilience is crucial when it comes to managing hardships and adversity. Most of us know this but we may not realize that there are many layers to resilience - it is not an all or nothing proposition. It can be made up of many small things that help us cope with stress more manageably, that help with recovery and moving forward in our lives the best way possible.

Be like rubber in its various forms: bending, stretching, or taking a new shape. Tough things will continue to occur in our lives but we can take steps to care for ourselves and foster enough resilience so we don't break.

So, if you have been feeling especially stressed out lately, don't fret. Resilience is a skill that can be worked on, just like playing the piano or riding a bike - and resilience can be developed and improved at any age! Try practicing any of the following strategies to build your resilience.

## How to build resilience

### 1. Self-care: mental and physical

One of the most important components of building resiliency is good self-care. A key piece is to engage in activities that are relaxing, bring peace or calm, and if possible, bring you happiness or meaning. This means different things to different people. For some, this may look like going for a beverage with a group of friends, while for others it means reading a book in the park. What is important about mental self-care is that it contributes to positive feelings about yourself. Participating in activities that you enjoy can strengthen your resilience by relieving stress and building confidence.

Your physical health should also be considered when you practice self-care. Exercising, eating a well-balanced diet, drinking plenty of water, and getting enough sleep every night are all essential in staying physically healthy. You don't need to be perfect - think "good enough". Often, when we are stressed, we are hard on ourselves, and this doesn't help our stress levels. When you give your body what it needs, and are kind to yourself, you increase your capacity to deal with life's stressors and the ability to bounce back from them.

### 2. Surround yourself with friends and family

Getting through difficult times can be much easier when you have others around you for support. Being able to confide in your

friends and family can be a great way to relieve stress, facilitate a different perspective, and help you feel less alone. Supports can help to ground us and see the bigger picture in trying times, and hopefully help with ways to learn and grow as we move forward.

And the process goes both ways. Supporting and helping others can also contribute to your positive mindset and help build confidence.

### 3. Take ownership of your own mindset, and be as supportive and fair as you can

Sometimes we get stuck in feelings of helplessness and lack of control. These feelings can make coping with stress even harder. You may not be able to change external events, turn back the clock, or know what will happen in the future. Lack of control and uncertainty can be very hard to grapple with. However, you can work on being present, and evaluate events and feelings from a compassionate and fair perspective.

Consider the impacts of these opposing feelings:

- Self blame vs. acceptance
- Guilt and avoidance vs. acknowledging and reaching out
- Being upset with yourself for how you are feeling vs. being gentle and kind with yourself in regards to how you are feeling

It helps to take action for yourself where possible. Even in times of terrible stress, we can make choices and take steps that help us move forward - even if it is one tiny step at a time. Consider what you do have agency over and start from there. Ask yourself what might be some supportive caring actions you can start and then build on. The kinder you are to yourself, the more resilient you will be.

### 4. Ask for help

There are few greater feelings than deciding to build a skill and following through on your goal. However, sometimes solving a problem or developing a skill is not possible on your own, or you may have no idea where to start. In this case, don't hesitate to reach out - especially when it comes to your mental health. There are many great resources available to build your resilience, including seeking advice from mental health specialists, such as psychologists and counsellors.

If you would like to learn more about resilience and how to develop it, reach out to your care team and **book an appointment** with one of our mental health specialists today.





# GENDER'S ROLE IN MENTAL HEALTH

Note: Medisys supported by TELUS Health respects and welcomes all genders to its clinics across Canada. This article examines the impact of male and female gender roles on mental health based on existing and available research, is still needed on the correlation between mental health and other genders.



You may be surprised to learn that the prevalence of mental illness is almost identical among men and women – yet there are striking differences in the ways that men and women experience mental health issues.

Numerous studies have shown that gender is actually a significant determinant of mental health, starting in childhood. The World Health Organization (WHO) summarizes the relationship between gender and mental health from childhood to adulthood like this:

- In childhood: most studies report a higher prevalence of conduct disorders (such as aggressive and antisocial behaviours), among boys than girls.
- In adolescence: girls have a much higher prevalence of depression and eating disorders, and engage more in suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than boys. Boys experience more problems with anger, engage in high-risk behaviours and actually commit suicide more frequently than girls.
- In adulthood: the prevalence of depression and anxiety is much higher in women, but substance use disorders and antisocial behaviours are higher in men.

Let's take a closer look at the role that gender plays in some common mental health issues, and why.

## DEPRESSION & ANXIETY

Depression is the most common mental health issue among women. It is twice as common in women than in men, and it's one of the leading causes of global disability burden today. Interestingly, depression may also be more persistent in women than men, but more research is needed on this distinction.

Women are also twice as likely to experience anxiety as men, but women are more likely to internalize their emotions, which often results in isolation and depression. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to externalize anxious emotions, often resulting in aggressive, impulsive or coercive behaviours.

### Why?

Gender-based roles, lifestyle stressors, difficult life events and biological factors may put women at greater risk of developing depression and anxiety than men.

For example, most primary caregivers are women – caring for their own children, others' children, a partner, parents, or someone with a chronic health problem or disability. In fact, 75% of those who care for someone with a mental health problem are women.

Women also often juggle multiple roles including household work, parenting and paid work, which is another factor that may contribute to stress and overwhelm in more women than men. To use a timely example, women have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of mental health impact: women are more likely than men to report worse mental health since the pandemic began in Canada (25.5% compared to 21.2%), and 30.5% of Canadian women say their lives have become "quite a bit" or "extremely" stressful during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 24.0% of men.

Unfortunately, women are much more likely than men to live in poverty, and therefore have less access to community and healthcare resources than men do from a global perspective.

Of course, hormonal changes that are unique to women including premenstrual, pregnancy, postpartum, perimenopausal and

menopausal changes can also significantly affect mood and contribute to depression and/or anxiety on their own, or when combined with other factors.

## POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Women are, unfortunately, more likely than any other group to experience violent conflicts, civil wars, disasters and displacement: about 80% of the 50 million people worldwide exposed to such life circumstances are women and children. It is not surprising, then, that women are the largest single group of people affected by PTSD.

### Why?

In addition to the horrible circumstances outlined above, more women than men have concerns about their personal safety, gender-based violence and sexual abuse. Women may also be more reluctant to disclose a history of victimization than men, which makes the illness harder to treat.

## ALCOHOLISM

The lifetime prevalence rate for alcohol dependence is more than twice as high in men than in women: approximately 1 in 5 men compared to 1 in 12 women develop alcohol dependence during their lives. It is important to note, however, that men are also more likely than women to tell their health care providers about problems with alcohol use, so prevalence statistics may be skewed as a result.

### Why?

One study found that when men and women consume similar amounts of alcohol, men experience a greater release of dopamine – a hormone responsible for pleasurable feelings – than women. But gender stereotypes about the proneness of men to alcoholism may also play a role in the prevalence of the disease.

Unsurprisingly, gender bias also plays a role in the treatment of mental illness. For example, doctors are more likely to diagnose depression in and prescribe mood-altering drugs for women than men, even when they present identical symptoms. This reality further underscores the grave need for access to mental health support at work, at home and in our communities.

If you're feeling increasingly sad, anxious or hopeless, contact your healthcare provider or log on to [\*Akira by TELUS Health\*](#) to start a virtual consultation with a clinician. No matter your gender or the nature of your mental health concern, our healthcare providers are trained to provide immediate mental health support. We're here for you, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

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# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF DURING MENOPAUSE

By Donna Acal, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Health Group

Menopause is a normal part of aging. It occurs when your menstrual cycle has stopped for 12 consecutive months – usually between the ages of 45 and 55. As levels of estrogen fall, your periods become irregular and your cholesterol and blood pressure may become higher. Other symptoms may include hot flashes, night sweats, irritability, poor concentration, weight gain and a decline in mental health. Ultimately this can be a time of significant change, so it's important to prioritize taking care of yourself during the transition. Here are some changes to be aware plus suggestions for thriving through them:

## MENTAL HEALTH

### What happens:

Menopause often causes mood swings but may also coincide with increased stress, anxiety, and feelings of fear. Worries about physical changes, aging and children leaving home are common, but it's important to seek support and recognize signs of depression if they occur.

### What you can do:

- Start a virtual consult with a healthcare practitioner on

your *Akira by TELUS Health app*, or speak with your doctor if you notice unusual feelings like ongoing irritability, angry outbursts, guilt or worthlessness, loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy, trouble concentrating or making decisions, or lapses in memory.

- Practice relaxation techniques like meditation, deep breathing and mindfulness practices. The apps Calm, Headspace and Waking Up all have a free version for meditation.
- Seek support from friends, family members or colleagues who may be experiencing similar changes, or locate a virtual support group.
- Exercise. Regular physical activity can help relieve stress and improve energy and mood. Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise, five days a week. [Click here](#) to download our free Bodyweight exercise guide.
- Quit smoking. Research suggests that menopausal women who smoke are at greater risk of developing depression, compared to nonsmokers.
- Remember that this chapter of life is temporary.



## BONE HEALTH

### What happens:

Decreased estrogen levels leads to lower bone mineral density. This results in increased risk of fractures.

### What you can do:

- Make sure there are sources of calcium in your diet. Choose leafy greens like turnip/mustard greens, collards, kale and bok choy, tofu, beans and fortified beverages for calcium. Yogurt, cheese and milk are good sources too.
- Aim for 2000 IU of vitamin D3 and 1000 - 1200mg of calcium/day. If taking a supplement, limit dosage to 500mg at a time. Try to get the calcium you need from food if possible.
- Vitamin K2 optimizes calcium absorption in the bones and decreases calcification in the arteries. Aim for 120 mcg/day from a supplement. Take with vitamin D for best absorption.
- Exercise regularly including weight bearing and resistance training.

## CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH

### What happens:

Estrogen helps keep blood vessels relaxed and open. Without estrogen, cholesterol may build up and hardening of the artery walls occurs. This affects cholesterol and blood pressure and increases the risk of cardiovascular disease.

### What you can do:

- Eat foods rich in dietary fibre like whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes like beans and lentils.
- Include unsaturated fats like nuts/seeds, omega 3 fatty fish or vegetarian sources like tofu, EVOO, avocado, flaxseed.
- Maintain a physically active lifestyle.

## SLEEP

### What happens:

Hot flashes, insomnia and migraines are common sleep-hindering symptoms experienced by menopausal women.

### What you can do:

- Be aware of what triggers hot flashes, like caffeine, alcohol, cigarette smoke and stress.
- Magnesium supplements may improve sleep. Magnesium

glycinate is best absorbed but you can also try magnesium malate or citrate. To help with sleep, try 100 - 200 mg before bed.

- Make sleep a priority. Try to get 7 - 9 hours. [Click here](#) to download our ultimate sleep guide.
- Evidence of using herbs and supplements, like black cohosh, evening primrose oil, red clover and maca to manage hot flashes and mood swings show mixed results. These supplements may work for some woman, but not others. Be sure to let your doctor know as they can interfere with other medications.

## WEIGHT GAIN

### What happens:

Weight gain is common through menopause due to normal age related biological and lifestyle changes. Hormonal changes in menopause may be associated with greater waist-hip ratio too. These hormonal changes increase the rate at which women store visceral fat, which surrounds the vital organs deep within the abdomen. This expands the stomach area which many women feel around their waist.

### What you can do:

- Try to balance your plate with 1/2 vegetables, 3/4 whole grains and 1/4 protein. This supports your nutrient needs.
- Include a protein source like meat, fish, tofu, nuts or hummus with meals and snacks as this will help with satiety.
- Foods with added sugar like granola bars, cookies and sugary beverages are often low in nutrients. When cravings occur, try to select whole foods like fresh fruit or dates.
- Be mindful of why you are hungry for a snack. Is it physical, emotional or a craving?
- Aim to minimize alcohol by drinking 0 to 1.5 drinks/day.
- Stay physically active.
- Maintain a regular sleep routine.
- Take time for self care. Honour your body and mind in a way that works best for you. It could be exercise, meditation or reading a book. This helps with managing stress, eating well and feeling good.

The period of menopause can be a challenging time in your life, both physically and emotionally. However, with age comes experience and wisdom. Try to embrace these years, accept who you are and enjoy your life. Do you have questions about menopause symptoms? Get instant answers from a live health practitioner by logging on to [Akira by TELUS Health](#), our 24/7 virtual care platform.

# 10

THINGS TO KNOW  
ABOUT ORGAN AND  
TISSUE DONATION





Organ and tissue donation can feel like a heavy topic to discuss, or even to think about, especially during an already-challenging time in our lives – but it's important to know the facts. For instance, you might be surprised to hear that during your lifetime, you are five times more likely to need an organ transplant than to donate one.

Those waiting to receive transplants have been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has paused many transplant surgeries and caused a reduction in organ and tissue donations overall.

Deciding whether or not to become an organ and tissue donor is a completely personal choice.

Here are 10 things to know before deciding what's right for you:

1. More than 1,600 Canadians are added to organ donation wait lists every year, and every three days someone dies while waiting for a transplant.
2. One donor can benefit more than 75 people and save up to eight lives. Organs and tissue that can be donated include the heart, kidneys, liver, lungs, pancreas, small intestines, eyes, bone, skin and heart valves.
3. 90% of Canadians support organ and tissue donation but less than 20% have registered as donors.
4. Paper donor cards are no longer in use. If you decide to be a donor, you must take two minutes to register online or in person wherever you renew your health card. By formally registering, you ensure that your confidential decision is recorded with the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and can be made available to your loved ones at the right time.
5. There is potential to be a donor at any age. The oldest organ donor was over 90 years old and the oldest tissue donor was over 100 years old.
6. People with serious illnesses can also be organ and/or tissue donors.
7. Organ and tissue donation does not impact funeral plans – an open casket funeral is still possible for organ donors.
8. If you decide to be an organ donor, your family members will be asked to reaffirm your choice, so it's important to share your wishes with loved ones when you are healthy. Less than half of families agree to donation if they are unaware of their loved one's decision, but the statistic rises to over 90% when the decision was known ahead of time.
9. Once a donor's family gives their consent, the donation process happens quickly – in about 24 hours. Medical tests determine which organs and tissues are suitable for transplant before they are matched with people on the transplant wait list. Surgery then takes place in an operating room at a hospital, and the donor's family is provided with general information about the recipients.
10. There are no costs involved with being a donor. Only you can know if registering to become a donor is the right choice for you.

Medisys supported by TELUS Health has no position on organ donation – it's a deeply personal decision. If you're having difficulty with this decision, it may be helpful to speak to your trusted physician and/or your religious leader about the pros and cons of organ donation.

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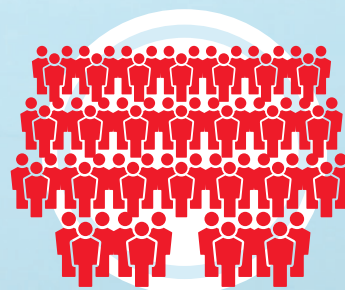
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