



# FEELING BETTER

DEALING WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN THE WORKPLACE

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## INTRODUCTION

### STRESS, OR SOMETHING ELSE?

Everyone knows what stress feels like—it hits when you're running late, trying to do too many things at once and can't seem to catch up. Work and family demands often keep us on the go, and from time to time, serious events—like an illness or death—turn the pressure up even higher.

Most of the time, whatever's causing the stress—a big project, car trouble or a sick child—is temporary, and so are our reactions. The anxiety, fear or frustration vanish once the job gets done, a problem is solved and we settle down into our regular routines. But if it doesn't let up—and comes along with lingering sadness, trouble sleeping or feeling panicked for no reason—our bodies are trying to tell us that something else is wrong. For up to 20% of Canadians, something is wrong: these feelings could mean that you're depressed or have an anxiety disorder (Mood Disorders Association of Ontario).



“IT COMES ON SLOWLY, LIKE A COLD—BUT INSTEAD OF A SORE THROAT AND TIREDNESS, IT’S ANXIETY OVER EASY DECISIONS OR SIMPLE RESPONSIBILITIES. YOU CAN’T SLEEP, LOSE YOUR APPETITE AND THEN IT’S A DOWNWARD SPIRAL INTO A TOTAL LACK OF JOY. IT’S AGONY.” —ELIZABETH P.

## PART ONE

### IS THERE SOMETHING WRONG?


Maybe you just don't feel like yourself, can't sleep or can't seem to focus on things, no matter how hard you try. Maybe you need a "mental health day" more often. How can you tell if your fatigue, sadness or flashes of panic are normal? They are if they're a reasonable reaction to what's going on in your life—sadness and fear are bound to come along with a divorce, a health crisis or losing a job. And it's perfectly normal to worry about your children, or where your career is headed. But if the symptoms don't go away, or get in the way of your work, relationships and interests, it's a sign that something more is going on.

#### SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- You have trouble sleeping
- You've lost interest in things you used to enjoy
- You're tired all the time and don't have any energy
- It's hard to concentrate
- You don't want to eat, or eat too much
- You're sad and easily upset
- You've lost or gained a noticeable amount of weight

#### SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

- Your level of fear or anxiety doesn't reflect what's going on in your life
- You experience chest pain or tightness, shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea or fluttering of the heart
- You have specific habits or rituals to control anxiety
- Your worries get in the way of your everyday activities

A person in a white lab coat is shown in profile, looking out over a vast ocean under a soft, hazy sunset sky. The person's face is in shadow, and the overall mood is contemplative and serene.

“GET HELP WHEN PEOPLE NOTICE THAT YOU AREN'T YOURSELF,  
WHEN YOU CONSTANTLY THINK THAT YOU CAN'T COPE OR WHEN  
YOU CAN'T DO THE THINGS YOU USED TO DO.”  
—DONNA HARDAKER, MENTAL HEALTH WORKS

It might be hard to admit that you're depressed or have an anxiety disorder. It's easier to blame yourself for making a big deal out of things, or for being too sensitive. But these disorders don't mean that you're weaker than everyone else, or that you've failed in any way. It means that you're human. These illnesses cross all lines—people with good jobs, good relationships and good health suffer from depression or anxiety too.

### DOES THIS MEAN I'M SICK?

Many people with anxiety disorders or depression manage to go to work and can get through everyday activities. Others have symptoms that are so severe they can hardly get out of bed or find it hard to be around other people. Anxiety disorders and depression are illnesses. Depression takes root when the brain doesn't function properly and its levels of serotonin—a chemical “messenger”—are thrown out of balance.



“IT’S OKAY TO FEEL BAD WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN, BUT IF IT CONTINUES, AND YOU’RE DEPRESSED ABOUT EVERYTHING, THAT’S A SIGN THAT SOMETHING IS WRONG.”

—KAREN LIBERMAN, MOOD DISORDERS ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO (MDAO)

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DEPRESSION

We hear the word “depression” now more than ever—people say they’re depressed over sports teams or the way a movie ended, when what they really mean is that they’re upset or disappointed for a little while.

There are different types of depression. Sometimes what you might think is just a lingering bad mood is actually a form of depression. *Minor depression* can fly under the radar as anxiety, no appetite or just feeling more emotional than usual. *Major depression* usually takes a more obvious physical toll—you may have lost a lot of weight, have low energy or trouble sleeping.

Researchers agree that feeling sad and hopeless for longer than two weeks is a hallmark of depression.

### DOES DEPRESSION AFFECT MEN AND WOMEN DIFFERENTLY?

Depression can affect everyone, but it does affect men and women differently: it seems to strike women more—they are almost twice as likely to get depressed—and can show up in different ways. While the classic signs, like sadness, weight loss and fatigue, affect both sexes, men may also show more anger, turn to alcohol or drugs or take risks with driving or relationships.

43% OF CANADIANS HAVE HAD A COLLEAGUE OR CO-WORKER WITH A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE.

—DESJARDINS FINANCIAL SECURITY HEALTH SURVEY

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ANXIETY

It's natural to worry about being late for a meeting, or how your son or daughter is doing in school or to jump a little when a car cuts you off on the road. Anxiety disorders—the most common type of mental illness in Canada—take natural reactions like worry, stress and fear and exaggerate them until people can't live normal lives.

But while depression shows up in our emotional well-being, anxiety disorders often reveal themselves in a very physical way: e.g., chest pain or tightness, dizziness, headaches, shortness of breath or palpitations (fluttering of the heart).

But for people with [generalized anxiety disorder \(GAD\)](#), these worries take an extreme turn. They are uncontrollable, often centre on a worst-case scenario—they'll lose their job, something terrible will happen to their child—and usually last at least six months. Most sufferers realize that their worry is out of control, but can't seem to stop. It generally doesn't stop them from working, but can affect their work performance and quality of life.

People with [phobias](#) have similarly extreme reactions. Social phobias make them self-conscious to the point that they avoid other people, while those with specific phobias can have a crippling fear of things like heights or spiders, for example.

Many of us head out of the house only to rush back to make sure the door is locked. Someone suffering from [obsessive compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#) may have to lock the door five times exactly or shower three times before they can leave. This disorder usually involves specific patterns or rituals that people follow so they can control their fears. It's very difficult for them to control their obsessions or rituals.

We read about traumatic events—serious car accidents, bank robberies or plane crashes—almost every day in the news. The terror of the event may not end for someone who lived through it, due to [post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\)](#), which can cause them to re-live the event through dreams or flashbacks. They may withdraw from people around them, have trouble sleeping or be on constant alert.

With [panic disorder](#), panic attacks strike anytime—while at work, grocery shopping or in the middle of the night. These attacks are characterized by intense fear, chest pain and dizziness. People may avoid social situations or other trigger events that they feel cause the episodes.

Anxiety disorders often come hand in hand with other mental health problems—like depression—and alcohol or substance abuse.

## PART TWO

### WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

#### DEPRESSION

It's possible for one thing—like a divorce or a death—to trigger a bout of depression. Some people are also more prone to anxiety and depression than others, but researchers have found that these disorders often arise when several factors collide.

- FAMILY HISTORY

It doesn't make it a given that you'll suffer from depression, but if other members of your family have had bouts of depression, you're at greater risk—up to three times more likely—to have one yourself (Wong. Research and treatment approaches to depression, *Nature Reviews—Neuroscience*;2.5,2001).

- SPECIFIC EVENTS

A death in the family, a robbery or other traumatic events can trigger depression. Researchers have found that people who are divorced or separated are at greater risk for depression.

- PHYSICAL ILLNESS

Illnesses, like heart disease, stroke, cancer and chronic pain, can contribute to higher rates of depression.

- PREGNANCY

Many new mothers suffer from “baby blues” shortly after giving birth. For one out of 10 women, pregnancy can trigger a serious form of depression, called Postpartum Depression (The Human Face of Mental Health Illness in Canada, 2006. Public Health Agency of Canada/Mood Disorders Society of Canada).

## THE WORKPLACE

Some on-the-job issues that can lead to depression are:

- Not having control over your work—do you have a say in your role and responsibilities?
- Unreasonable expectations
- Conflicts with supervisors or co-workers
- Lack of job security
- Night-shift work
- Too much overtime
- Harassment or violent workplace situations

## THE TECHNOLOGY FACTOR

Being “overconnected” can also add to workplace stress. Constant contact with the workplace via email, BlackBerries and voicemail are putting extra pressure on people to be in business mode all the time, which doesn’t give them a chance to enjoy downtime or fully relax.

It’s easy to feel overwhelmed at work. Research has found major links between work stress and depression, and sometimes it can be hard to tell whether your sense of burnout is actually something more. Some signs include: suddenly not being able to get along with your colleagues, neglecting your work or obsessing about work too much.

ONE OUT OF TWO CANADIANS SAY THEIR WORK IS STRESSFUL.  
—PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA



## ANXIETY DISORDERS

Like depression, anxiety disorders stem from a combination of factors, like other illnesses or a specific incident or trauma. Anxiety is characterized by a feeling of apprehension and fear accompanied by physical symptoms such as palpitations, sweating and stress. The disorder is overwhelming and can get worse over time if not treated. Anxiety disorders are also linked to depression.

### THE RIPPLE EFFECT

If you're depressed or have a serious anxiety disorder, you've probably already noticed that it doesn't just affect you—it takes a toll on the people around you and on almost every aspect of your life.

### PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Since depression usually comes with low energy and moods, many people may pull away from friends and family, or avoid social situations at a time when they need care and support the most.

“BEING AROUND A PERSON WHO IS DEEPLY DEPRESSED CAN BE A HUGE STRAIN. MY FAMILY TRIED TO COPE, BUT THEY DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO.” —ELLEN R.

## OVERALL HEALTH

What many people don't realize is that although depression is a mental disorder, it can have serious physical consequences, such as alcohol or drug abuse and increased risk of developing heart disease. It is also a major cause of disability for people between 18 and 44 years of age.

Women, too, face specific health risks along with depression—those with a history of mood disorders often have lower bone density than those who don't.

## IN THE WORKPLACE

It makes sense that employees struggling with depression aren't able to do their jobs as well as they did when they were feeling good—low energy, poor concentration and some of the physical side effects of depression often mean they are less motivated and sometimes unable to meet expectations on the job.

If you think your depression or anxieties are really taking a toll on your work, talk to your doctor, another healthcare practitioner or your employee assistance plan (EAP) provider.

ACCORDING TO STATISTICS CANADA, SEVEN OUT OF 10 CANADIANS WITH DEPRESSION ARE IN THE WORKFORCE. —STATISTICS CANADA HEALTH REPORTS 2006

## PART THREE

### GETTING HELP

“I WENT TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM FOR HELP.” —ROBIN

Figuring out that something is wrong—whether it’s depression or an anxiety disorder—is often the biggest hurdle in addressing mental and anxiety disorders. There is plenty of help out there.

#### WHOM SHOULD I TURN TO?

If you think you need help, get it. A doctor or a counsellor should be your first stop if you suspect that you have a mood or anxiety disorder. If you don’t have a family doctor, a local mental health association can point you in the right direction.

Depending on where you work, your company might have an EAP. These programs can help you find a counsellor or doctor in your area who can get you onto the road to recovery as soon as possible.

- **Family Doctors**—Family doctors can diagnose depression, offer counselling, prescribe helpful medications and, if necessary, refer you to a psychiatrist or psychotherapist.
- **Counsellors, Psychiatrists or Psychologists**—Professional mental healthcare providers can help both minor and major cases of depression and all anxiety disorders. They can spend more time with you to figure out what’s behind your illness and help you take steps toward recovery.
- **Mental Health Associations**—Organizations that specialize in mood disorders can help you find a local doctor or counsellor and point you toward local support groups.

## WHAT CAN I DO?

- Be honest—Don't be ashamed to tell your caregivers exactly what's going on, especially if you're using drugs or alcohol to deal with depression.
- Be patient—There can be a natural period of adjustment before you reach the right treatment effect.
- Take care of yourself—There may be a wait to see a psychiatrist or another caregiver. In the meantime, focus on self-care, making sure that you're eating well, getting the sleep you need and taking advantage of things like massage therapy to help with other problems that may accompany depression, like headaches. If you don't think you can wait to see a counsellor, tell your family doctor right away.
- If you are diagnosed with depression or an anxiety disorder, remember: It is treatable; talk to your doctor—together you can decide which treatment is best for you. Be sure to tell your doctor anything that could impact treatment selection:

Symptoms you find particularly troublesome:

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Concerns you may have about the various treatment options:

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- If you have private drug insurance coverage, let your doctor know: you may have access to a wider selection of cost-subsidized medications.

## TREATING DEPRESSION

People are more aware of depression, and because of this, more are getting treatment, according to Canadian researchers. But treating depression can be tricky—only one-third of all patients with depression are getting the right kind of care (Remick. Diagnosis and management of depression in primary care: a clinical update and review, *CMAJ*;167.11,2002).

For some cases of minor depression, some time to rest and recuperate, a better diet and more exercise can help boost moods. In more serious cases, a doctor may prescribe alternate measures.

## ANTIDEPRESSANTS

If your doctor decides that you need medication to treat your depression, finding the right one can take time. It usually involves some kind of trial and error, and patients usually try different “classes” of antidepressants until they find one that works for them.

- When will I feel better?

There’s no definite timeline for recovery. Getting back to your old self can take weeks or months, depending on how sick you are and what kind of treatment you’re getting. Sometimes, people notice that their physical symptoms, like fatigue, get better before things pick up emotionally. If you’re taking antidepressants, be careful. You might feel better, but shouldn’t stop treatment unless your doctor says it’s okay.

- What about side effects?

Like most medications, antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications can have side effects. However, in most cases there are no side effects and, if side effects do occur, they tend to be quite mild. Treatment with such medications is not only highly effective, it is generally very safe.

ALMOST HALF OF WORKERS SURVEYED THOUGHT THAT MISSING WORK BECAUSE OF DEPRESSION WOULD GET THEM INTO TROUBLE OR GET THEM FIRED. —IPSOS REID SURVEY

## COUNSELLING

Don't be put off by stereotypes about psychiatry and couches. Talk therapy—either with a psychiatrist, psychologist or counsellor—is another important remedy for depression. Studies have found that it can be as helpful as medications for mild cases of depression, but most researchers agree that a combination of medications and therapy is the best approach for major depression.

Interpersonal therapy involves talking about your relationships with other people and the world around you. This type of psychotherapy was developed for depression and can really help.

Cognitive behavioural therapy focuses on changing negative thinking. It is centred on current problems and difficulties, and can improve your state of mind.

## WHAT ELSE MIGHT HELP?

Light therapy—Studies have found that sunlight can help boost moods. Light therapy can be particularly helpful with seasonal affective disorder, commonly known as the winter blues.

Exercise and lifestyle changes—A little exercise can go a long way in easing some of the symptoms that accompany depression. This isn't an option for everyone though, since people with major depression may not have the energy to start or maintain a new exercise routine.

“SOMETIMES IT TAKES A LONG TIME TO GET PROPER TREATMENT. PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW THAT THERE ISN'T A QUICK FIX.”  
—DONNA HARDAKER, MENTAL HEALTH WORKS

## TREATING ANXIETY DISORDERS

Treatment of anxiety disorders takes a similar approach to treatment for depression—research shows that a combination of medication and psychotherapy is most effective.

### MEDICATIONS

In some cases, anxiety disorders are treated with antidepressants. Medications specifically for anxiety usually control symptoms and let people with serious disorders lead a better quality of life.

### COUNSELLING FOR ANXIETY

Some of the same approaches that help depressed patients can also help those with anxiety disorders.

Cognitive behavioural therapy can help patients change their thinking patterns and introduce them to more positive behaviours and reactions. Behaviour therapy can also help gradually refamiliarize patients to their anxiety triggers and help build their confidence.

Relaxation techniques can help patients adopt a more relaxed pace in everyday life.

### EDUCATE YOURSELF AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE

Understanding what's happening to you and finding out how to get the best care will help you get on the road to recovery that much faster.

## PART FOUR

### FINDING HELP AT WORK

“I WAS A STEWARDESS IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES AND THEN AN IN-FLIGHT SERVICE DIRECTOR [UNTIL 2000]. THERE WERE FEW PEOPLE WHO I COULD GO TO FOR HELP IN THE EARLY YEARS... I CARRIED ON AS MUCH AS I COULD BUT I WAS SO JUMPY AND UNSURE OF MYSELF THAT I WOULD TRY TO HIDE. IN THE EIGHTIES WE GOT AN EAP PSYCHOLOGIST ON STAFF. THAT WAS A HELP. I WAS ALLOWED TO TAKE TIME OFF TO GET BETTER.”  
—ELIZABETH P.

Many people might hesitate before looking for help with depression or anxiety at work. You might not want anyone to know what you're going through, or worry that the illness will affect your career. But there are ways to get support on the job without putting your privacy—or peace of mind—at risk.

79% OF WORKERS SAID THEY THOUGHT THAT SOMEONE DIAGNOSED WITH DEPRESSION WOULD KEEP IT A SECRET TO AVOID HURTING THEIR CAREER OPPORTUNITIES.  
—IPSOS REID SURVEY

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

An occupational health nurse—If your company has one, speak to an occupational health nurse who can help you get the right treatment for depression or anxiety; or, if you've had to be away from work, an occupational health nurse can help support your recovery on your return to work.

An employee assistance plan—EAP counsellors, for short-term therapy treatment, are usually available to help people through different stages of depression and put them in touch with local support groups, doctors and other mental health professionals, if they're needed.

Get to know your company's benefits plan. It may help pay for the treatments you need.

## IS YOUR WORKPLACE A HEALTHY ONE?

A little support on the job goes a long way. If you're struggling with your workload or conflicts with other colleagues, talk to your manager about what you need to help you be your best at work. Researchers have found that you'll do better work and be happier if your company clearly defines what they expect from you, makes sure that your skills match your job, gives you a say in the process and respects and rewards your efforts. Don't forget that your needs and expectations towards work are evolving throughout your career. Your personal life may also change (e.g., having a baby), which might impact your career plan. You may need to rethink it.

The bottom line is, if you are having trouble coping with depression or anxiety, don't ever be afraid to ask for help right away. Talk to a health care professional, to your company's occupational health nurse or to your EAP. These disorders can be treated very effectively and safely. As with any other illness, treatment of depression or anxiety is much more effective when the problem is recognized early and treatment (psychotherapy and/or medications) is started promptly.

## HELPING A CO-WORKER WITH DEPRESSION OR ANXIETY

Even if you're feeling fine, one of your co-workers may be struggling with depression or an anxiety disorder. If someone seems distracted and shows other signs of depression or anxiety, be as supportive as you can. If you have a trusting relationship with your colleague, you should encourage them to get help.

### DON'T:

- Try to minimize what they're feeling
- Tell them they're just having a bad day, or to "cheer up"

Some mood disorders may show up as angry or aggressive behaviour. If this is the case in your workplace, take care to protect yourself—walk away if you feel threatened, but tell a supervisor or manager about the situation.

In general, it's a good idea to treat all your colleagues with respect. Mental health expert Dr. Martin Shain suggests that workers treat each other like neighbours, making sure that:

- You understand each other's needs and points of view
- You think about the impact your words and actions have on others

## PART FIVE

### BACK TO WELLNESS

Some people can find their way back from depression and anxiety quite quickly. For others, it's a much longer process, depending on how severe their symptoms are, and how well they respond to treatment. According to mental health experts at the U.S.-based Mayo Clinic, those in recovery can ease the way back to wellness with the following steps:

#### SET REALISTIC GOALS

Whether at home or at work, don't take on more than you can handle. If a task seems big, break it down into manageable parts.

#### TURN TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Loneliness and isolation can be a big part of depression and anxiety disorders. Spending time with people who care about you and support you can help the recovery process.

#### DO THINGS YOU LOVE

Whether it's sports, gardening or just going for a walk, taking part in things that are important to you puts the focus on positive activity, and helps you relax and get back to your old self.

#### PUT OFF MAJOR DECISIONS

You're not yourself when you're in the throes of a major mood disorder. Don't make big decisions—like moving or switching jobs—until you feel better.

"I WENT TO SOCIAL SERVICES AND A REHABILITATION CENTRE. MY MENTAL ILLNESS NOW SEEMS TO BE IN REMISSION."—ELLEN R.

## TAKE IT EASY

Pace yourself—if you’re recovering, be mindful of what you need to stay healthy.

## REMEMBER THE BASICS

Eating well, avoiding alcohol and drug abuse, getting exercise and getting a good night’s sleep create an essential foundation to recovery.

## HOW CAN I STAY WELL?

Dealing with one bout of depression can put you at risk for another: one episode makes you 50% more likely to have another, while two raise that risk to 75% (Mood Disorders Association of Ontario).

One big way to help prevent future distress is to change the way you deal with stress or anxious situations. Some researchers recommend paying close attention to how you respond to things that happen in your life. If you are responding negatively, try to rethink the situation and be as realistic as possible—is the problem as big as you think it is? Is it a temporary problem? How will it affect your life? What can you do to manage the impact? Other researchers recommend breathing exercises or meditation to help deal with stress in a more positive way.

“THERE IS HOPE. THE PAIN DOESN’T HAVE TO BE WITH YOU FOREVER. THERE’S HOPE WITH TREATMENT AND RECOVERY, IT DOESN’T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY.” —DONNA HARDAKER, MENTAL HEALTH WORKS

## DIRECTORY

### **BC Partners for Mental Health and Addiction**

<http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca>

### **Canadian Collaborative Mental Health Initiative**

[www.ccmhi.ca](http://www.ccmhi.ca)

### **The Canadian Mental Health Association**

Phone: (416) 484-7750

[www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

### **Check Up From the Neck Up**

Give yourself a mental health check-up at this Ontario-based site.

[www.checkupfromtheneckup.ca](http://www.checkupfromtheneckup.ca)

### **DepNet**

A practical online resource for depression. [www.depnet.ca](http://www.depnet.ca)

### **Mental Health Works**

Find out how to stay healthy and happy on the job.

[www.mentalhealthworks.ca](http://www.mentalhealthworks.ca)

### **National Institute of Mental Health (U.S.)**

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

### **National Network for Mental Health**

Phone: (905) 682-2423

[www.nnmh.ca](http://www.nnmh.ca)

### **Mood Disorders Society of Canada**

Phone: (519) 824-5565

[www.mooddisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)

### **Moods Magazine**

[www.moodsmag.com](http://www.moodsmag.com)

### **REVIVRE**

Quebec Anxiety, Depressive and Bipolar Disorder Support Association

[www.revivre.org](http://www.revivre.org)

### **Université Laval**

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[www.workandstress.ca](http://www.workandstress.ca)

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Psychiatric and neurological disorders are complex. Our goal is simple – to improve the quality of life for patients and their caregivers, and the treatment options for their dedicated healthcare professionals.



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The Standard Life Assurance Company of Canada is a major investment, retirement and financial protection company. The Group Life & Health business provides group life and health insurance, dental care, travel assistance, accidental death and dismemberment and short- and long-term disability insurance. We see the management of health and disability as a cycle, and seek to offer help and support at every stage. Not only do we seek to tackle health issues before they start, we also take a proactive, collaborative approach with our clients in order to implement strategies geared towards having a positive influence on all of the important aspects of managing disability claims. Along with its affiliated companies in Canada, The Standard Life Assurance Company of Canada had \$36.89 billion in assets under management as of December 31, 2006. We offer a wide range of financial products and services to over 1.31 million individuals, including group insurance and pension plan members.



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