

# Living With Depression

Everyone experiences occasional disappointment, sadness, and loss in their lives. When you are feeling down, blue, or sad for at least 2 weeks in a row, it may mean that you have depression. Depression can affect your thoughts and feelings, relationships, daily activities, and physical health. It is caused by changes in the way your brain functions. If you receive a diagnosis of depression, your health care provider will tell you which type of depression you have and what treatment options are available to you.

If you are living with depression, there are ways to help you recover from it and also ways to prevent it from coming back.

## How to cope with lifestyle changes

### Coping with stress

Stress is your body's reaction to life changes and events, both good and bad. Stressful situations may include:

- Getting married.
- The death of a spouse.
- Losing a job.
- Retiring.
- Having a baby.

Stress can last just a few hours or it can be ongoing. Stress can play a major role in depression, so it is important to learn both how to cope with stress and how to think about it differently.

Talk with your health care provider or a counselor if you would like to learn more about stress reduction. He or she may suggest some stress reduction techniques, such as:

- Music therapy. This can include creating music or listening to music. Choose music that you enjoy and that inspires you.
- Mindfulness-based meditation. This kind of meditation can be done while sitting or walking. It involves being aware of your normal breaths, rather than trying to control your breathing.
- Centering prayer. This is a kind of meditation that involves focusing on a spiritual word or phrase. Choose a word, phrase, or sacred image that is meaningful to you and that brings you peace.
- Deep breathing. To do this, expand your stomach and inhale slowly through your nose. Hold your breath for 3–5 seconds, then exhale slowly, allowing your stomach muscles to relax.
- Muscle relaxation. This involves intentionally tensing muscles then relaxing them.



Choose a stress reduction technique that fits your lifestyle and personality. Stress reduction techniques take time and practice to develop. Set aside 5–15 minutes a day to do them. Therapists can offer training in these techniques. The training may be covered by some insurance plans. Other things you can do to manage stress include:

- Keeping a stress diary. This can help you learn what triggers your stress and ways to control your response.
- Understanding what your limits are and saying no to requests or events that lead to a schedule that is too full.



- Thinking about how you respond to certain situations. You may not be able to control everything, but you can control how you react.
- Adding humor to your life by watching funny films or TV shows.
- Making time for activities that help you relax and not feeling guilty about spending your time this way.

## Medicines

Your health care provider may suggest certain medicines if he or she feels that they will help improve your condition. Avoid using alcohol and other substances that may prevent your medicines from working properly (may *interact*). It is also important to:

- Talk with your pharmacist or health care provider about all the medicines that you take, their possible side effects, and what medicines are safe to take together.
- Make it your goal to take part in all treatment decisions (*shared decision-making*). This includes giving input on the side effects of medicines. It is best if shared decision-making with your health care provider is part of your total treatment plan.

If your health care provider prescribes a medicine, you may not notice the full benefits of it for 4–8 weeks. Most people who are treated for depression need to be on medicine for at least 6–12 months after they feel better. If you are taking medicines as part of your treatment, **do not** stop taking medicines without first talking to your health care provider. You may need to have the medicine slowly decreased (*tapered*) over time to decrease the risk of harmful side effects.

## Relationships

Your health care provider may suggest family therapy along with individual therapy and drug therapy. While there may not be family problems that are causing you to feel depressed, it is still important to make sure your family learns as much as they can about your mental health. Having your family's support can help make your treatment successful.

## How to recognize changes in your condition

Everyone has a different response to treatment for depression. Recovery from major depression happens when you have not had signs of major depression for two months. This may mean that you will start to:

- Have more interest in doing activities.
- Feel less hopeless than you did 2 months ago.
- Have more energy.
- Overeat less often, or have better or improving appetite.
- Have better concentration.

Your health care provider will work with you to decide the next steps in your recovery. It is also important to recognize when your condition is getting worse. Watch for these signs:

- Having fatigue or low energy.
- Eating too much or too little.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Feeling restless, agitated, or hopeless.
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions.
- Having unexplained physical complaints.
- Feeling irritable, angry, or aggressive.

Get help as soon as you or your family members notice these symptoms coming back.

## How to get support and help from others

### How to talk with friends and family members about your condition

Talking to friends and family members about your condition can provide you with one way to get support and guidance. Reach out to trusted friends or family members, explain your symptoms to them, and let them know that you are working with a health care provider to treat your depression.



### Financial resources

Not all insurance plans cover mental health care, so it is important to check with your insurance carrier. If paying for co-pays or counseling services is a problem, search for a local or county mental health care center. They may be able to offer public mental health care services at low or no cost when you are not able to see a private health care provider.

If you are taking medicine for depression, you may be able to get the generic form, which may be less expensive. Some makers of prescription medicines also offer help to patients who cannot afford the medicines they need.

### Follow these instructions at home:

- Get the right amount and quality of sleep.
- Cut down on using caffeine, tobacco, alcohol, and other potentially harmful substances.
- Try to exercise, such as walking or lifting small weights.
- Take over-the-counter and prescription medicines only as told by your health care provider.
- Eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein. **Do not** eat a lot of foods that are high in solid fats, added sugars, or salt.
- Keep all follow-up visits as told by your health care provider. This is important.



### Contact a health care provider if:

- You stop taking your antidepressant medicines, and you have any of these symptoms:
  - Nausea.
  - Headache.
  - Feeling lightheaded.
  - Chills and body aches.
  - Not being able to sleep (*insomnia*).
- You or your friends and family think your depression is getting worse.

### Get help right away if:

- You have thoughts of hurting yourself or others.

**If you ever feel like you may hurt yourself or others, or have thoughts about taking your own life, get help right away. You can go to your nearest emergency department or call:**

- **Your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**
- **A suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. This is open 24-hours a day.**

## Summary

- If you are living with depression, there are ways to help you recover from it and also ways to prevent it from coming back.
- Work with your health care team to create a management plan that includes counseling, stress management techniques, and healthy lifestyle habits.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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