

# What You Should Know About Your Treatment



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ValueOptions Depression Series #

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The risk for relapse - a return of depressive symptoms - is high.

Relapses can be worse than the initial episode, and are very upsetting to people. The symptoms you have worked so hard to get rid of may come back, and treatment must usually start all over again.

Consider the first few months when you are feeling better as a time when you can look at areas of your life that you may want to change. Some of these areas may have led up to your depression, or made it worse. You may already know what kinds of changes are necessary. You may read self-help books (found in any large bookstore), join a self-help group, or ask for a therapy referral if you have not done so already. Therapy can be effective in helping you learn ways to cope with your problems. When you feel better, you are more able to think about and solve problems for the long term.

## Continuation Phase

The continuation phase refers to the period when your depressive symptoms have largely gone away. You have returned pretty much to normal (that is, how it was at work, with friends, with your family, etc.). Again, while it may seem as though your depression has been successfully treated, you should continue to take your medication until you talk to your physician. This is to avoid having the depression return.

If this is your first period of depression, at approximately 7-9 months, you and your physician should discuss how

and when to stop taking medications. Stopping medications should be done gradually over a period of weeks. Just quitting your medications can result in a variety of symptoms that may seem like the flu. When stopping medications, you should be alert to any return depressive symptoms. In the event that any symptoms begin to come back, talk to your physician to decide if medication should be started or changed early, before you develop a full relapse.

## Maintenance Phase

Major depression happens only once for about half the people who get it. For the other half, it is an illness that will return one or more times. For most people with repeated episodes of depression, the symptoms go away completely between episodes. But for some people with depression, there are continuing symptoms between episodes. Maintenance treatment refers to ongoing use of medications. This is often recommended for people who have had more than one episode of depression. The more times you have been seriously depressed, the more likely you are to have it come back again. In such cases, your physician may talk to you about using medications on a long-term basis (over several years). He or she may even urge lifetime use of the medications that have been helpful in treating your symptoms.