

Managing Depression



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ValueOptions® Depression Series

3

According to the World Health Organization, 121 million people currently suffer from depression. An estimated 5.8% of men and 9.5% of women will experience a depressive episode in any given year. The good news is that depression is easy to treat and many people are being helped.

Signs of depression include:

- Loss of interest in enjoyable activities
- Feeling worthless
- Sleeping too much, too little or waking up very early
- Loss of appetite and weight loss or increased appetite and weight gain
- Having less energy or feeling slowed down
- Feeling grumpy and restless
- Problems focusing and remembering
- Physical problems that don't go away (i.e. headaches or stomach pain)
- Thoughts of death or suicide

If you are suffering from depression, there are steps you can take to control your symptoms and begin living a positive life.

Tips for managing depression

Get medical care: Some depressions are caused by medical problems. The first step in treating depression is to treat any physical illness. Some medications that you may be taking to treat high blood pressure or other common problems can cause depression.

Educate yourself: Learn about the illness. Knowing about the illness and what to expect gives you a sense of control. Your mental health center, doctor and self-help groups are all good sources of information.

Avoid negative people and situations: Do your best to avoid people who put you down and make you feel bad. Try to be around people who care about you, although depression can cause feelings that loved ones no longer care. This may be a direct result of depression changing your perception of how your loved ones interact.

Think positive thoughts: Keep in mind that when people are depressed they think negatively, especially about themselves.

- Catch yourself when you think negative thoughts, and instead focus on the positive.
- Make a list of nice things people say about you to remind yourself.

Evaluate your lifestyle: Sometimes, your lifestyle can contribute to depression. Evaluate the way you live, things you need to change in your life and do them. Try to avoid stress, loneliness or being around angry people.

Be social: Depression can make you want to avoid other people, which is not helpful. Your family and/or close friends are important helpers. Below are some tips for using social relationships to help:

- **Don't shut people out.** Make time for family and close friends.
- **Share your thoughts and concerns** with people who are close, as talking helps.



Set small goals: Depression has a negative impact on self esteem, and it often makes you feel worthless. Setting and accomplishing small goals will give a sense of self worth and achievement. For example:

- Have a daily routine and do one thing at a time
- Set reachable goals
- Notice your success
- Reward yourself

Caring for your health: It is important to take care of your health. You may become depressed because you are physically ill.

Some health tips include:

- **Get enough sleep:** Almost everyone with depression has a problem with sleep; either they get too little or too much.
 - Sleep about 8 hours a day.
 - Wake up and go to sleep at the same time daily.
- **Eat a well balanced diet:** People with depression often eat too little, which can cause poor nutrition and weight loss. Some people are nervous and may eat too much.
 - Eat at least three meals per day.
 - Talk with your doctor or dietician about foods that can help you feel better.
- **Exercise:** Exercise can do wonderful things, and it may help your brain to release chemicals that improve mood and self-control.
 - Pick an activity you enjoy and can stick with, such as walking or biking.
 - Plan on doing it at least three days per week for half an hour.

- **Learn to relax and manage stress:** Stress can make you feel out of control and add to depression. Find something relaxing to do:
 - Learn to meditate.
 - Try yoga or tai chi for gentle, focused exercise.
- ***Take your medicine:** Most people with depression or who are recovering will do better with medication. If your doctor has given you medication and it works, keep taking it. Often one medication will not remove your symptoms, and a change in medications or addition of a second one is helpful. Remember, antidepressant medications are not “uppers” or “downers,” but work by leveling the chemicals in your brain so that your brain cells can communicate normally. It may take several months for medication to correct the problem, so even if you start to feel better continue the medication(s) until your physician says to reduce or stop. If you stop too soon the depression will re-occur.

** On rare occasions, medication sometimes increases energy levels before improving mood, and a person with suicidal thoughts and increased energy levels could make a plan of self harm. With a combination of good and bad feelings, as well as improved energy, some may carry out suicide attempts. This is not the time to stop taking prescribed medication!*

Any suicidal thoughts must be reported immediately to the 24-hour Clinical Referral Hotline, your doctor, therapist or 911!