

Risk for Relapse



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ValueOptions® Depression Series

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The risk for relapse: return of depressive symptoms

Depressed people remain vulnerable to relapse even after successful treatment, and it can be worse than the initial episode. It is very upsetting because the symptoms you worked so hard to get rid of may come back, and treatment usually starts all over again.

It is important that you and your therapist or doctor plan the completion of your treatment together. You may have identified factors that trigger depressed feelings, and can continue to cause stress. Many of these problems developed over many years and will not get resolved in a matter of months. It is very useful to make notes on upsetting situations and what to do when they repeat. Therapy can help you learn ways to cope with your problems, find what triggers them, and teach strategies for keeping them under control. When you feel better, you can think about and solve problems for the long term. For extra support, you should feel free to contact your therapist at any time during your recovery.

Stages of therapy

It is often useful to think of your recovery in stages:

Initial phase

During the first stage of treatment your doctor may put you on an antidepressant medication.

- Antidepressants are not “uppers” or stimulants, but rather remove or lessen symptoms of depression by bringing the chemicals in your brain that affect

mood back to normal. They help depressed people feel the way they did before they became depressed.

- Your doctor may ask you some questions and possibly add a second medication in a few weeks.
- You may begin to feel better in a couple of weeks or it could take longer. Continue to take the medication even if you don't feel better right away.
- Talk to your doctor about any side effects.
- It is possible to have symptoms gradually go away.
- Do not stop taking the medication without talking to your doctor first.

Continuation phase

- The period when your depressive symptoms have mostly gone away.
- You have returned to normal (how it was at work, with friends, family, etc.).
- Discuss with your doctor before you stop taking any medications, especially if this is your first period of depression. He/she may want you to keep taking them even if you are feeling better.
- Stopping medications should be done gradually over a period of weeks. Just quitting medications can result in a variety of flu-like symptoms. When stopping medications, tell your doctor if you feel the symptoms of depression again. He/she will 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 bouts of depression, symptoms go away completely between episodes, but for some there are continuing symptoms.
- Maintenance treatment refers to ongoing use of medications, which is often recommended for people with more than one period of depression. The more times you have been seriously depressed, the more likely you are to have it come back. The more episodes of untreated depression you experience, the more difficult it may be to eliminate the illness.
- Your doctor may talk to you about using medications on a long-term basis (over several years). He/she may even urge lifetime use of medications that have been helpful in treating your symptoms.
- Use self-help books and support groups to help your recovery progress.

**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!