



---

## ***A Depression Education Toolkit***



---

## ***Facts about Depression in Older Adults***

---

### ***What is Depression?***

Depression is a medical illness. When sadness persists or interferes with everyday life, it may be depression. When feeling 'blah' persists or interferes with everyday life, it may be depression. Depression usually doesn't change in response to different circumstances, good news, or the passing of time. Depression can last months or even years if not treated. Depression is NOT a normal part of aging. It is not the usual response to loss or the physical ailments of growing old.

### ***What Are the Symptoms of Depression?***

#### **Key Symptoms:**

- Depressed or sad mood
- Decreased interest or pleasure in activities

#### **Other Symptoms:**

- Significant changes in appetite or weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Restlessness or sluggishness
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Lack of concentration or indecision
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide

### ***What Causes Depression?***

Depression is a medical illness with multiple causes including biological, psychological, social and medical factors. The symptoms of depression may reflect an imbalance in brain chemistry often brought about by common factors including genetics, stress or loss, or other physical changes co-occurring with medical illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and Parkinson's disease. Sometimes depression can develop without any obvious cause.

### ***How is Depression Treated?***

Depression is treatable. Appropriate treatment, such as medication and psychotherapy, relieves symptoms for most older adults. It is very important for you to be an active participant in your treatment. You can do this by selecting the most appropriate treatment, monitoring your treatment and following-up with your health professional. If people receive proper treatment for depression they will feel more energetic, hopeful, focused and involved in daily activities.



---

## ***Managing Your Depression***

---

**You are more likely to recover from depression if you monitor your progress and talk with your nurse or medical doctor regularly.**

Here are the main things to watch for:

**1. Depressed mood or feelings of sadness.**

*As treatment progresses you should notice that you feel less down, blue or sad. Let the nurse or medical doctor know of any changes, good or bad, or if you don't notice improvement within 2-4 weeks of starting treatment.*

**2. Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities.**

*Within a few weeks of starting treatment, you should start to take interest in and enjoy the things you used to. Tell your nurse when this happens, or if you don't notice any improvement.*

**3. Discouragement and hopelessness.**

*You should expect to feel less discouraged and hopeless as treatment progresses. If these feelings get worse, it is very important to tell your provider.*

**4. Thoughts of death or suicide.**

*If you have any thoughts that you would be better off dead, or of ending your life, tell your doctor immediately, or call 911 if it's an emergency. These feelings get better with treatment.*

**5. Medications.**

*It is important that you take your antidepressant medication exactly as prescribed. If you are unable to take your medication, sometimes miss doses, or are having any side effects, tell your nurse so that changes can be made. It is not safe to stop taking medications without consulting your nurse or medical doctor, even if you feel better.*



---

## ***How Can You Help Yourself With Your Depression?***

---

It is important to remain active physically as well as mentally. You can help yourself with your depression by setting specific daily and weekly goals for self-care and pleasurable activities. Even individuals with physical limitations can find ways to increase activity levels and help with their depression.

Use this form to record and track your personal goals with family members and health providers.

### **1. Take care of yourself:**

- Follow your home exercise program.
- Keep active. Go outside for fresh air.
- Take care of personal health, such as eating healthy foods, bathing, and dressing.

My personal goal for taking care of myself is:

---

---

### **2. Make time for pleasurable activities:**

- Watch a video.
- Listen to music.
- Do a hobby (reading, gardening, puzzles).

My personal goal for pleasurable activities is:

---

---

### **3. Stay connected to the people who can support you:**

- Call people on the phone.
- Talk with a friend.
- Spend time with family.

My personal goal for staying connected is:

---

---



---

## ***Patient Education: Antidepressant Medication***

---

### ***What symptoms do antidepressants help with?***

Antidepressants help with sad mood; lack of pleasure in activities; loss of appetite; sleep problems; feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and guilt; loss of energy; loss of sex drive; trouble concentrating; feeling slowed down; agitation; and preoccupation with death or suicide.

### ***What are some facts about antidepressant medications?***

- They are not addictive.
- There are no long-term risks.
- They take time to work, so you may have to take them as long as eight weeks before they become effective.
- They work best when you take every dose that is prescribed.
- The type of medication and the dose that works best is often different from person to person.
- Antidepressants do not change life circumstances directly, but they can enable people to change or cope better.

### ***How was your specific antidepressant chosen?***

Many factors influence the choice of a medication to treat your depression. Matching the medication that will best affect your symptoms is very important, as well as taking into consideration what kind of side effects each antidepressant may have or the other medications you are taking. Sometimes, good and bad responses to these medications run in families, so it may even help to know if a family member has experience with antidepressants.

### ***What are the common side effects of antidepressants?***

Most antidepressants used for older adults who are depressed have been shown to be generally well tolerated and have few side effects. There are some side effects that you can experience such as mild appetite loss, nausea, gastrointestinal upset, sleepiness or trouble sleeping at night, jitteriness or anxiety, blurred vision, sweating, dizziness, headache and changes in sexual functioning. Most of these side effects typically diminish or disappear within the first few days or weeks of starting treatments. It is VERY IMPORTANT to report any side effects that you experience to your health provider.

### ***What is the usual course of treatment for antidepressants?***

1. A small test dose for a few days is given to start treatment.
2. The dose is gradually increased to a normal dose.
3. It is important to wait for the antidepressant to work in improving your symptoms. You may start to notice a change in symptoms in the first couple weeks. Symptoms can continue to improve up to 8 weeks or more.
4. Selecting an antidepressant that works for you may take a few tries. Be open to trying different kinds of antidepressants until you find the best one for you.
5. For depression, it is also important for you to continue to take the antidepressant for at least 6-12 months. Some people continue the medication for the rest of their lives.

### ***How do I manage these medications on my own?***

- Ask your doctor or nurse questions about anything you don't understand.
- Use a reminder system so you don't forget to take doses.
- Take your medication exactly as prescribed.
- Keep a list of all the medications you take regularly.
- Report any side effects.
- Do not take any other medications, prescription or over-the-counter, without first talking to your prescriber. If another doctor or nurse prescribes something for you, tell her what you are already taking.
- Keep all medicines out of the reach of children.
- If this medicine makes you sleepy, don't drive a car or operate other dangerous machinery.
- Do not abruptly stop your medication. Contact your physician if you no longer want to take your medication.

This resource provides brief, general information about this health care topic. It does not take the place of specific instructions from your health care providers. For answers to other questions consult your physician or other health care provider.