Depression Questions, Answers and Solutions
On the path to recovery

How this booklet can help

This booklet will help you and your family better understand your medical condition and its treatment. Specifically, it will help explain the following:

- Symptoms of depression and its treatment
- How to make the most of your treatment
- How family or friends can help

Please keep in mind that this booklet is not meant to replace a discussion about your condition with your health care provider, who knows your medical needs best. If you have questions regarding your condition or treatment, contact your health care provider.

For your convenience, you can use the section provided on the back of this booklet to jot down any questions you may have. Be sure to bring it with you during visits to your health care provider to help remind you of important questions.

The facts about depression

What is depression?

Depression is a very common medical condition. The symptoms of depression can be triggered or worsened by life's difficulties. The key symptoms include:

1. A sad, anxious or empty mood that lasts for 2 weeks or more; and/or
2. Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities you once enjoyed

In addition, people with depression often feel several or all of these symptoms:

- Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness or guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Changes in sleep habits (trouble sleeping/sleeping too much)
- Significant change in weight or appetite
- Feeling tired, rundown or low on energy
- Agitation
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Frequent thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

What causes depression and the anxiety symptoms that often come with it?

The exact cause of depression is not completely understood. Research has shown that depression may be linked to a chemical imbalance in the brain. Some scientists believe depression is caused by an imbalance of serotonin — a natural chemical found in the brain. A family history of this condition may also play a role in its development.

How are depression and its associated anxiety symptoms treated?

Some people are treated with “talk therapy,” medication, or a combination of both. Talk therapy involves working with a trained professional (often a psychologist) to help understand any problems that may cause or add to feelings of depression and its associated anxiety symptoms.

Some of the most commonly used medications for treating depression are known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. Medical studies have shown that these medicines are safe and effective and can be used by most patients with minimal problems or complications. In fact, most patients find them easy to take.

Making the most of your treatment

How long will I have to take medication?

For some people, depression is a chronic condition—which means that it can last for a long time and may come back several times during their lifetime. These individuals may require long-term treatment to keep their condition under control. The best way to find out how long you should stay on therapy is to ask your health care provider. Your health care provider will tell you how long to take the medication and when you may be able to cut back and eventually stop.

No one likes to stay on medication any longer than they have to, but if you stop taking your medicine too soon, it could interfere with your recovery and progress.

So, even if you're feeling better, it's important to keep taking your medication for as long as your health care provider advises. If you should experience any side effects, be sure to report them to your health care provider as soon as possible and follow his/her advice.

For the best results...

Communicate with your health care provider

Your health care provider is relying on you to discuss your symptoms. At first, it may be difficult to talk about feelings of depression or anxiety, but it's the only way your health care provider can decide on the best treatment for you. To assist you in your discussions, you can write down any questions you may have for your health care provider at the back of this booklet.
Follow through with your treatment

It is very important that you follow your healthcare provider’s instructions about your treatment. You should not stop taking your medication or change your dose unless your healthcare provider tells you it’s okay to do so. Try not to feel discouraged if your symptoms do not improve right away; it may take a couple of weeks before you start to feel better. You can track your progress on the page at the end of this booklet to see how much you’ve improved.

Learn as much as you can about your condition

Take advantage of all available resources to learn about depression (with symptoms of anxiety) and its treatment. To help you get started, we’ve provided a list of key organizations and Internet sites. These organizations can provide you with valuable information and resources.

Local health centers, hospitals or libraries are also excellent places to obtain information. Support groups are frequently sponsored by local health centers or clinics and can be helpful to you and your family.

Seek the support of people who care

Any condition that affects your mood and behavior may also influence your relationships. This is certainly true of depression. But you don’t have to feel alone in your efforts to be well. Talking with someone who cares about you—a family member or friend—can provide you with important and valuable support.

Be patient

There may be times when your condition creates a great deal of stress for family and friends. Depression is a condition that requires medical treatment—and time—to resolve. So, it’s important for your family members to be patient with you during your recovery and for you to be patient during your treatment.

For further information

The following organizations can provide information on depression and other mood disorders. They can also suggest support groups in your area.

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
730 N Franklin Street, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60610-7204
1-800-826-3632
www.dbsalliance.org

Mental Health America
2001 North Beauregard Street, Sixth floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
1-703-684-7722
www.nmha.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847
1-800-789-2647
www.samhsa.gov

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)
6001 Executive Boulevard
Bethesda, MD 20892
1-301-443-4513
www.nimh.nih.gov
Questions for my health care provider

Use this section to write down anything you may want to ask your health care provider about the disorders and treatments mentioned in this booklet.

About depression:

About treatments:

About symptoms:

About other things:

Track your progress

You’ve taken the important first step to getting well by having seen your health care provider. The next steps are for you to follow your treatment plan and keep your health care provider informed about your progress.

Take your medication as directed and use the symptom tracker to track your improvement. Your progress tells your health care provider how well your medication is working.

How are you feeling this week?

Fill in this symptom checklist at the start of your treatment. Write in any specific symptoms that you may be experiencing (e.g., sadness, restlessness, irritability) in the space provided. Then, rate your improvement every week by circling the number that most accurately describes the progress of your symptoms (see the rating system below). Keep in mind that it may take a couple of weeks before you start feeling better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptoms</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
<td>1 2 3 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating System

1 = No change  
2 = Slightly improved  
3 = Much improved  
4 = Very much improved

Remember to have your prescription filled before you finish it. This will help make sure that you don't miss any doses, which could set back your treatment and delay your recovery.