

## Depression Toolkit



Although depression may occur only once during your life, people typically have multiple episodes. During these episodes, symptoms occur most of the day, nearly every day and may include:

- Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness, or hopelessness
- Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration, even over small matters
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities, such as sex, hobbies, or sports
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or sleeping too much
- Tiredness and lack of energy, so even small tasks take extra effort
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased cravings for food and weight gain
- Anxiety, agitation, or restlessness
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and remembering things
- Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts or suicide
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches

For many people with depression, symptoms usually are severe enough to cause noticeable problems in day-to-day activities, such as work, school, social activities, or relationships with others. Some people may feel generally miserable or unhappy without really knowing why.

## Depression Symptoms in Older Adults

Depression is not a normal part of growing older, and it should never be taken lightly. Unfortunately, depression often goes undiagnosed and untreated in older adults, and they may feel reluctant to seek help. Symptoms of depression may be different or less obvious in older adults, such as:

- Memory difficulties or personality changes
- Physical aches or pain
- Fatigue, loss of appetite, sleep problems or loss of interest in sex — not caused by a medical condition or medication
- Often wanting to stay at home, rather than going out to socialize or doing new things
- Suicidal thinking or feelings, *especially in older men*

### When to See a Doctor

If you feel depressed, make an appointment to see your doctor or mental health professional as soon as you can. If you're reluctant to seek treatment, talk to a friend or loved one, any health care professional, a faith leader, or someone else you trust.

### When to get Emergency Help

If you think you may hurt yourself or attempt suicide, call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

Also consider these options if you're having suicidal thoughts:

- Call your doctor or mental health professional.
- Call a suicide hotline number — in the U.S., call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**. Use that same number and press "1" to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.
- Reach out to a close friend or loved one.
- Contact a minister, spiritual leader or someone else in your faith community.

If you have a loved one who is in danger of suicide or has made a suicide attempt, make sure someone stays with that person. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately. Or, if you think you can do so safely, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room.

# Treatment Options



Living with depression can be difficult, but treatment can help improve your quality of life. Talk to your healthcare provider about possible options.

You may successfully manage symptoms with one form of treatment, or you may find that a combination of treatments works best.

It's common to combine medical treatments and lifestyle therapies, including the following:

## Medications

Your healthcare provider may prescribe:

- Antidepressants
- Antianxiety
- Antipsychotic medications

Each type of medication that's used to treat depression has benefits and potential risks. Sometimes depression doesn't respond to medication. Your healthcare provider may recommend other treatment options if your symptoms don't improve.

These include electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), or repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) to treat depression and improve your mood.

## Psychotherapy

Speaking with a therapist can help you learn skills to cope with negative feelings. You may also benefit from family or group therapy sessions.

## Light therapy

Exposure to doses of white light can help regulate your mood and improve symptoms of depression. Light therapy is commonly used in seasonal affective disorder, which is now called major depressive disorder with seasonal pattern.

## Alternative therapies

Ask your healthcare provider about acupuncture or meditation. Some herbal supplements are also used to treat depression, like St. John's wort, SAMe, and fish oil.

Talk with your healthcare provider before taking a supplement with prescription medication because some supplements can react with certain medications. Some supplements may also worsen depression or reduce the effectiveness of medication.

## Exercise

Aim for 30 minutes of physical activity 3 to 5 days a week. Exercise can increase your body's production of endorphins, which are hormones that improve your mood.

## Avoid alcohol and drugs

Drinking or misusing drugs may make you feel better for a little bit. But in the long run, these substances can make depression and anxiety symptoms worse.

## Learn how to say no

Feeling overwhelmed can worsen anxiety and depression symptoms. Setting boundaries in your professional and personal life can help you feel better.

## Take care of yourself

You can also improve symptoms of depression by taking care of yourself. This includes getting plenty of sleep, eating a healthy diet, avoiding negative people, and participating in enjoyable activities.

## Natural Treatment for Depression

Traditional depression treatment uses a combination of prescription medication and counseling. But there are also alternative or complementary treatments you can try.

It's important to remember that many of these natural treatments have few studies showing their effects on depression, good or bad.

Likewise, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) doesn't approve many of the dietary supplements on the market in the United States, so you want to make sure you're buying products from a trustworthy brand.

*Talk to your healthcare provider before adding supplements to your treatment plan.*

## Supplements

Several types of supplements are thought to have some positive effect on depression symptoms.

- St. John's wort
- S-adenosyl-L-methionine (SAMe)
- 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP)
- Omega-3 fatty acids

## Essential Oils

Essential oils are a popular natural remedy for many conditions, but research into their effects on depression is limited.

People with depression may find symptom relief with the following essential oils:

- **Wild ginger:** Inhaling this strong scent may activate serotonin receptors in your brain. This may slow the release of stress-inducing hormones.
- **Bergamot:** This citrusy essential oil has been shown to reduce anxiety in patients awaiting surgery. The same benefit may help individuals who experience anxiety as a result of depression, but there's no research to support that claim.

Other oils, such as chamomile or rose oil, may have a calming effect when they're inhaled. Those oils may be beneficial during short-term use.

## Vitamins

Vitamins are important to many bodily functions. Research suggests two vitamins are especially useful for easing symptoms of depression:

- **Vitamin B:** B-12 and B-6 are vital to brain health. When your vitamin B levels are low, your risk for developing depression may be higher.
- **Vitamin D:** Sometimes called the sunshine vitamin because exposure to the sun supplies it to your body, Vitamin D is important for brain, heart, and bone health. People who are depressed are more likely to have low levels of this vitamin.

*Many herbs, supplements, and vitamins claim to help ease symptoms of depression, but most haven't shown themselves to be effective in clinical research.*

# DEPRESSION SELF-CARE CHECKLIST

- Clean the dishes** - the only two chores you need to worry about right now are dishes and laundry.
- Eat a real meal** - ready meals or a tin of soup is fine!
- Get some fresh air and sunshine** - walk around the block or just put a chair in the garden and sit in it.
- Take a power pose** - sit or stand up straight, and stretch out your arms and legs.
- Write out your thoughts** - get it out of your head and on to paper.
- Write down three positive things** - they can be tiny things, like a cup of tea.
- Clean yourself** - just wipe your face with a flannel and use some dry shampoo.
- Go to a café** - be around other people.
- Spend time with animals** - they love unconditionally.
- Exercise** - something light, like walking or hatha yoga.



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Depression Self-Care Action Plan



Patient Physician/ \_\_\_\_\_
NP/PA Clinic \_\_\_\_\_
Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Choose one area and add other areas as you begin to feel better.



1. Stay active.

Make time every day to do some physical activity such as walking for 10 or 20 minutes or dancing to a favorite song.

Every day during the next week, I will spend at least \_\_\_\_\_ minutes doing \_\_\_\_\_



2. Do something that you think is fun each day.

Even though you may need to work a little more at having fun, try doing something that has always been fun such as a hobby or listening to music or watching a favorite video or TV show.

Every day during the next week, I will spend at least \_\_\_\_\_ minutes doing \_\_\_\_\_



3. Spend time with people who help or support you.

When you are feeling down, it is easy to avoid people, but you should not be alone all the time. Choose people who you can talk to or who can do your activities with you. Talk to them about how you feel. If you can't talk about it, that's okay.

During the week I will make contact for at least \_\_\_\_\_ minutes with \_\_\_\_\_ (name), doing or talking about \_\_\_\_\_ (name), doing or talking about \_\_\_\_\_

4. Relaxing



For many people with depression, it is hard to stop feeling sad or having unhappy thoughts. Physical activity can help and so can learning to relax. Things like slow deep breathing, saying comforting quiet things to yourself, taking a warm bath, or sitting and concentrating on relaxing one leg and one arm at a time can help.

Every day during the next week, I will practice relaxing at least \_\_\_\_\_ times for at least \_\_\_\_\_ minutes each time.

5. Set simple goals.

Do not expect too much too soon. Do simple things like reading only a few pages of a magazine, or make one bed or fix a cup of tea or cocoa. Delay big decisions until you are feeling better. Give yourself credit for each thing you do and break work into small steps.

What I want to do is \_\_\_\_\_
Step 1: \_\_\_\_\_
Step 2: \_\_\_\_\_

How likely are you to do the above things during the next week?

Very likely Maybe Unsure Not very likely