Depression: Taking Care of Yourself While You Recover

Taking good care of yourself is important as you recover from depression.

In time, your symptoms will fade as your treatment takes hold. Do not give up. Instead, focus your energy on getting better.

Be realistic
Your mood will improve. It just takes some time. You will begin to feel better gradually. If you have a large task to do, break it up into smaller chunks you can handle, and just do what you can.

You may want to put off important decisions until your depression has lifted. If you have plans that will have a major impact on your life, such as marriage, divorce, or a job change, try to wait a bit. Talk it over with friends and loved ones who can help you look at the overall picture first.

Stay active
Depression can make you feel alone. Being with friends and family may lift your spirits and help you feel better. But take things slowly. Do not do too much too soon.

• Stay busy and get outside. Take a walk or try some other light exercise.
• Go to a movie or concert. Take part in a church activity or other social gathering. Go to a ball game.
• Ask a friend to have dinner with you.

Ask for help
Reaching out to people for help is important. Do not isolate yourself. Let your family and friends help you.

Find someone you can trust and confide in. Call that person or call 911 right away if you are thinking seriously about killing yourself or if you feel you can’t stop from hurting yourself or someone else. You can also call the national suicide hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

Take good physical care of yourself
Focus on things that can help you feel better, such as eating well and getting enough rest.

• Eat a balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein. If you have lost your appetite, eat small snacks rather than large meals.
• Avoid drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs. Do not take medicines that have not been prescribed for you. They may interfere with medicines you may be taking for depression, or they may make your depression worse.
• Take your medicines exactly as they are prescribed. You may begin to feel better within 1 to 3 weeks of starting antidepressant
medicine. It can take as many as 6 to 8 weeks to see more improvement. If you have problems or concerns about your medicines, or you do not notice any improvement within 3 weeks, talk to your doctor.

- If you plan to stop your medicine, talk with your doctor first about how to do it safely. You may need to stop slowly over time. Suddenly stopping some medicines may cause side effects and may cause your depression to come back or get worse.

- If you have any side effects from your medicine, tell your doctor. Antidepressants can make you feel tired, dizzy, or nervous. Some people have dry mouth, constipation, headaches, sexual problems, or diarrhea. Many of these side effects are mild and will go away on their own after you have been taking the medicine for a few weeks. Some may last longer. Talk to your doctor if side effects are bothering you too much. You might be able to take a different medicine.

- Try to be more active. Talk with your doctor about an exercise program. Exercise can help with mild depression.

- Get enough sleep. If you have problems sleeping:
  - Go to bed at the same time every night, and get up at the same time every morning.
  - Keep your bedroom dark and quiet.
  - Do not exercise close to the time you go to bed.
  - Avoid drinks with caffeine in the hours before you go to bed.

- Avoid sleeping pills unless your doctor prescribes them. Also avoid alcohol. They can make your sleep restless. They can also cause a reaction with any medicine you are taking for your depression.

- If you have any other illnesses, such as diabetes, heart disease, or high blood pressure, make sure to continue with your treatment. Tell your doctor about all of the medicines you take, including those with or without a prescription.

- Be patient, and be kind to yourself. Remember that depression is not your fault and is not something you can overcome with willpower alone. Treatment is necessary for depression, just like for any other illness. Feeling better takes time, and your mood will improve little by little.