



# Understanding depression:

A guide for members, families and friends



**Amerigroup**  
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in healthcare

What is  
**depression?**

Everyone feels blue or sad some of the time, but these feelings rarely last. Most times they pass within a few days. When a person has depression, it hinders daily life and normal functioning.

## What are the symptoms of depression?

- Feelings of:
  - Sadness, anxiety or emptiness that don't go away
  - Hopelessness
  - Guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
  - Restlessness and/or irritability
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable, including sex
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness) and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Inability to sleep, early-morning wakefulness or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not get better even with treatment

## What causes depression?

**Depression can appear for no reason at all. Other causes include:**

- Family or personal history of major depression and/or substance use disorder
- Recent loss
- Chronic medical illness
- Stressful life events that include loss, like the death of a loved one or divorce
- Domestic abuse/violence
- Traumatic events, such as a car accident
- Major life changes, like a job change
- Some medications

# How can depression be treated?

**The first step to treating depression is to see a health care provider. There are a few things you can do before your visit:**

- Identify the most important problem or issue.
- Write down the problem and symptoms.
- List the medications you're taking.

If you see a primary care provider (PCP) for care, he or she may do a physical exam. Your PCP will also screen for other health conditions. If no physical cause is found, your PCP may do a screening for depression.

**Here are some things you can do during your exam:**

- Tell your PCP what is bothering you.
- Describe how long it has been a problem.
- Ask questions about anything you don't understand.

A depression screening may be done by your PCP. Or you may see a social worker, psychologist or psychiatrist without your PCP's referral. After your visit, be sure to write down your diagnosis. List all prescribed treatments and medications. Include details about how long to take them, how they will help you and what happens if you don't take them. Write down when to return for your next visit or when to call your PCP.

Treatment for depression may differ from person to person. It often includes medication and some type of talk therapy or psychotherapy.

# Can medications help treat depression?

When you first start to take medication for depression, you may have side effects. These medications, called antidepressants, may cause:

- Dry mouth
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea
- Nervousness
- Blurred vision
- Constipation
- Trouble sleeping
- Sexual problems
- Drowsiness

If you're taking antidepressant medications, you should not drive until you adjust to any side effects. You will need to work with your doctor to find the medications that best help you.

People don't respond the same way to the same medications. Talk to your doctor before taking new medications. These include ones that don't need a prescription.



Your doctor is your partner in treating depression. Talk to your doctor about any concerns you have about your medications. Your doctor can help find a medication that has the fewest side effects and will work for you.

# Why is taking medication important?

Depression medication only works if taken daily as ordered by a doctor. It can take weeks for these types of medications to take effect. Be sure to take the medications even if you're feeling better. Always follow your doctor's advice about how much medication to take and how often to take it. **The medications do not work if they're taken only when you feel depressed or down in the dumps.**

**Do not stop taking antidepressant medication without talking to the doctor who prescribed it. Medications should never be stopped all at once unless the doctor says it's all right to do so. Antidepressants are not habit-forming.**

There are many reasons why you might not take your medication. Below are some of the most common reasons people do not take their medications as prescribed.

- I don't think my medication is working, so why should I take it?
- My medication makes me feel bad because of the side effects, so I stopped taking it.
- My medication costs too much or isn't covered by my insurance.
- I ran out of medication and haven't been to see my doctor.

Tell your doctor if you're not taking your medications as prescribed. Your doctor will not know the right way to help you unless he or she knows you're not taking your medications.

Some medications should not be taken with other medicines. This can cause harmful reactions. People taking antidepressant medications should always tell their doctor about other medicines they're taking. This includes over-the-counter medicines bought at the drug or grocery store. For example, if you're taking St. John's wort as an herbal remedy, be sure to tell your doctor.

# What about psychotherapy treatments?

Psychotherapy or talk therapy can help people with depression. Some types are short term (10 to 20 weeks), and others are longer term. A good, supportive relationship with a therapist or case manager can be very helpful in treating depression.

Therapists, case managers and disease management case managers can help you learn more about depression. They can promote proper use of medications. They can help you accept the reality of your illness without losing hope for the future.



# How can families and friends help?

Families and friends play a crucial role in supporting a person who has depression. For starters, they'll need to know as much as possible about the condition. This helps them watch for warning signs to help prevent bouts. They also can help you to take your medications properly.

## To help someone with depression, a friend or relative can:

- Offer emotional support, understanding, patience and praise
- Encourage the person to stay in treatment
- Engage the person in conversation and listen carefully
- Never laugh at feelings the person expresses, but point out facts and offer hope
- Never ignore comments about suicide and let the person's therapist or doctor know right away
- Invite the person out for walks, outings and other activities. Keep trying if he or she declines. But don't push him or her to take on too much too soon. Although diversions and company are needed, too many demands may increase feelings of failure.
- Remind the person that, with time and treatment, the depression will lift

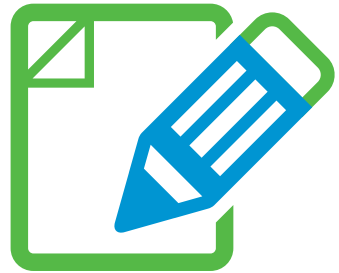




# What can I do?

**If you're depressed, remember these feelings are part of your condition. Here are a few things you can do to help with your treatment:**

- Keep a daily diary. It can help remind you of the changes you have made.
- Engage in mild activity or exercise. Go to a movie, a ballgame or another event or activity that you once enjoyed. Take part in religious, social or other activities.
- Set realistic goals for yourself.
- Break up large tasks into small ones. Set some priorities and do what you can as you can.
- Try to spend time with other people. Talk to a trusted friend or relative. Try not to be alone. Let others help you.
- Expect your mood to improve over time, not right away. Do not expect to suddenly snap out of your depression. Your sleep and appetite may begin to improve before your depressed mood lifts.
- Wait to make big decisions like getting married, divorced or changing jobs until you feel better. Discuss decisions with others who know you well. They may have a more neutral view of your situation.
- Remember that positive thinking will replace negative thoughts as you respond to treatment.
- Find community resources to support your needs.



# What other help is available?

The Amerigroup Community Care Disease Management Centralized Care Unit has a program for members with depression.

## How can we help?

### We can provide you with:

- Personal help managing your health condition
- Help coordinating care between your PCP and other specialists
- Information about local support services for your condition
- Information about resources in the community
- Phone calls to you and your doctors to track progress

### If you would like more information about the disease management program for depression:

- Call us toll free at 1-888-830-4300 (TTY 711). You can reach us Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Eastern time.
- Review your Amerigroup member handbook.
- Visit our website at [www.myamerigroup.com/GA](http://www.myamerigroup.com/GA). Log in with your member information. Go to the Health and Wellness page.

## Suicide risk as an emergency

People with depression attempt suicide much more often than people who don't have the disorder. Get help right away if you're thinking about hurting yourself. Friends or family should call the treating psychiatrist and/or therapist or 911 if a person with depression talks about or tries suicide. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY 1-800-799-4889 to talk to a trained counselor 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## Additional resources

### **Amerigroup 24-hour Nurse Helpline**

1-800-600-4441 (TTY 711)

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY 1-800-799-4889

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

### **The National Institute of Mental Health**

1-866-615-6464 (TTY 1-866-415-8051)

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

### **Mental Health America**

1-800-969-NMHA (6642)

[www.nmha.org](http://www.nmha.org)

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness**

1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

[www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)

### **Community Mental Health Centers**

### **Peer support groups**

### **Online support groups**

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#### Sources:

National Institute of Mental Health, [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

Department of Health and Human Services, [www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, [www.ahrq.gov](http://www.ahrq.gov)

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