

Knowing What to Expect:

Diagnosis and Treatment of Depression

What is Depression?

Everyone feels unhappy at times. It is normal to feel sad after a disappointment or a loss. But, depression is more than those brief periods of sadness. Depression is a medical disorder that lasts longer than normal bouts of the “blues.”

Symptoms of Depression include 5 or more of these symptoms lasting two or more weeks:

- Feelings of sadness or emptiness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- Appetite and weight changes (increase or decrease)
- Feelings of mental/physical slowness or agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, or guilt
- Feeling tired
- Difficulty concentrating
- Sleep disturbances (sleeping less or more than usual)
- Thoughts of death/suicide

What Causes Depression?

Depression can have more than one cause, including: heredity, past experiences, biology, or recent stressful events. An imbalance in the chemicals in the brain that control mood can cause depression.

How is Depression Treated?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health and the American Psychiatric Association, depression can be treated effectively with Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Interpersonal Therapy, medication, or a combination of therapy and medication. Treatment may include one or more of the following:

- **Antidepressant Medication**
Corrects imbalances in the chemicals in the brain that control mood
- **Psychotherapy** (Individual, Family, Group)
Helps you:
 - Achieve improved mood and a complete remission of symptoms (for mild depression)
 - Understand which factors in your life may be causing the depression
 - Learn how to manage the symptoms of depression
 - Learn how to change your way of thinking about depression
- **Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)**
Relieves symptoms quickly when depression is severe and endangers the patient's health. ECT is usually used only after medication has failed to relieve the symptoms of depression.
- **Light Therapy**
Treats Seasonal Affective Disorder, a form of depression brought on by reduced daylight in wintertime.
- **Self-Help and Support Groups**
Provides emotional support: Resources can be found on numerous Web sites, such as:
www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm#ptdep8

What Should I do If I Think I May Be Depressed??

1. The first step is to get an evaluation for depression. You can do any of the following:
 - Talk to your Primary Care Physician (PCP) who may do a screening for depression. Your PCP will also evaluate if there is a medical condition causing your depression or making it worse. If your PCP refers you to a behavioral health practitioner, be sure to sign a release of information form so the behavioral health practitioner can communicate with your PCP to coordinate your care.
 - Call Evernorth Behavioral Health and speak with a Personal Advocate who is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
 - Make an appointment participating behavioral provider. Locate a practitioner at www.myCigna.com.
2. When you go to see the behavioral health practitioner for the first time, be prepared to provide information about your physical health and any current medications you are taking, including vitamins and herbs. Also, write down instructions your practitioner gives you. Do not be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand something.
3. Come to an agreement with your practitioner on your treatment plan. Follow the treatment plan. Even though you may be feeling better, symptoms may come back if treatment is not completed.
4. Do things to help yourself:
 - Take an active role in your treatment. Start by learning as much as you can about depression.
 - Keep a Daily Activities Log to help you recognize which activities affect your mood and monitor your compliance with your treatment activities.
 - Keep a record of the medications you take and what effect they have on your mood.
 - In most cases, medication should be continued for at least 6-9 months. Do not stop medication without talking to your physician. Take an active role in your treatment. Start by learning as much as you can about depression.
 - Follow the recommendations of your PCP or behavioral health practitioner. Keep all scheduled appointments.
 - Tell your doctor about any side effects from medication that you may experience.
 - Take care of yourself with a balanced diet, moderate exercise and regular bedtimes, and by reducing stress and avoiding alcohol and illegal drugs.

References:

American Psychiatric Association, www.psych.org National Institute of Mental Health, www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depression.cfm#ptdep8

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