

MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER: SELF-HELP ADVICE FOR DEPRESSED PATIENTS

Advice

- ❏ Don't fight the depression--try and accept it as an illness.
- ❏ You cannot the depression away, only accept it.
- ❏ Delay any big decisions about work, marriage, or money until you feel better.
- ❏ Don't trust your memory right now – take notes and make lists. This will improve when you feel better.
- ❏ Waking through the night is very common. It's better to get out of bed until you feel sleepy again.
- ❏ Mornings are usually terrible. The day usually gets better towards evening.
- ❏ Avoid being home alone for long periods – the depressive thoughts can get worse when no one is around.
- ❏ Forget about trying to read technical or complicated material – you need your concentration to do this – stick to light novels and People magazine.
- ❏ Be careful about television – comedy and cartoons are okay, but anything else can depress you even more than you already are.
- ❏ Get outside at least once a day for a walk by yourself.
- ❏ Light exercise of any kind can be very helpful to your recovery.
- ❏ If you must do some work, do it in the afternoon or early evening. Your energy and interest are best at these times.
- ❏ Try and keep busy, but only with projects that involve your hands, not heavy thinking tasks.
- ❏ Talking to loved ones or friends will be difficult for a while. Sympathetic people

can make you feel worse. Until you feel better, cancel all non-essential social engagements.

- ❏ Suicidal or hopeless thoughts are common in depression and will go away once you start feeling better. Talking to someone about these thoughts can help make them go away.
- ❏ Your appetite for food is probably low and you may have lost weight. These are core symptoms of depression and will return to normal with treatment. In the meantime, eat small nutritious snacks and have other people cook for you.
- ❏ When you start to get better, you will notice a few minutes or more of feeling quite normal, but it doesn't last. These minutes become hours and then most of the day is pretty good. Full recovery takes longer, sometimes a couple of months.
- ❏ Don't be surprised if most people are confused by your condition and don't know what to say to you. No one can really understand your suffering unless they have had a major depression.

Once again, don't fight the depression – try and accept it as an illness. You will be back to normal soon.

What My Family Can Do

Most families worry about a member who is depressed. Some people feel angry and overwhelmed. It is difficult to understand why a depressed person is not "snapping out of it". The first thing to keep in mind is the depressed person cannot help feeling depressed. Sudden crying spells, angry outbursts, and hopeless statements like,





"what's the point?" are common. This behavior will disappear with treatment. You can help by distracting the depressed person by keeping them busy with tasks they can accomplish easily. Be patient and reassuring; help with decision-making and make sure the person gets to appointments with the doctor and takes the medication. Short conversations are better than long talks. As the person recovers, encourage them to be more active and resume their previous responsibilities. Suicide can be a worry. Asking about thoughts of suicide is not going to encourage a suicide attempt.

Talking about suicidal thoughts is often a great relief to the depressed person. However, anyone seriously thinking about taking their life needs urgent professional help to prevent a tragedy. Families should inform the doctor of any concerns they have.

Recommended Readings

Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy -D.

Burns, Signet, New York, 1980.

A persuasive self-help guide for treating depression by a cognitive therapist. Includes charts, homework assignments to offer

mechanisms for coping with problems such as procrastination, loneliness, and negative thinking. Gives clear indicators for need of professional treatment. Highly recommended.

Overcoming Depression - D.F. Papolos, Harper and Row, New York, 1987.

Excellent, practical overview of the symptoms and cause of depressive disorders with much useful advice for the patients and families. Highly recommended.

Your Brother's Keeper - J.R. Morrison, Nelson Hall Publications, Chicago, 1982.

Also, difficult to find in bookstores, but available in libraries. Good practical advice for families regarding the treatment of mood disorders.

Rapid Relief from Emotional Distress - G.

Emery, Fawcett Columbine, 1986. Practical, cognitive techniques to master mild depression.

Unfinished Business: Pressure Points in the Lives of Women - M. Scarf, Doubleday and Company, New York, 1980. A very useful

description of psychological problems that can cause depression in women. Useful as a resource in the psychotherapy of depression.

"Self-help works! "

