

DEPRESSION: A FAMILY CONCERN

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What is depression like?

It is difficult for you, as a family member, to comprehend the magnitude of your loved one's despair and unhappiness unless you've experienced depression firsthand.

Depression is much more than feeling "sad" or "blue". It is a whole body experience. In terms of daily functioning, this illness can be more debilitating than arthritis, hypertension, or diabetes. Everything seems like a complicated ordeal to the depressed person. Having to return a phone call or attend a social event can be overwhelming. The depressed person often feels worthless and may even contemplate suicide.

Will I notice other changes in behaviour?

Yes, you may notice some behavioural changes other than just sadness. Interest in sex often disappears and sleep disturbances are common. Some people can't get a good night's sleep because of early morning wakening, while others crave carbohydrates. The depressed person is often irritable, hostile, pessimistic, unable to concentrate. It's tough to live with a depressed person.

How can I help my family member?

Depression isn't controlled by willpower, so your loved one can't just "snap out of it". Patients can't cure themselves by simply trying harder to be happy or active. And you can't cure the illness by arguing the positive sides of life. In fact, constantly trying to cheer up the depressed family member will only make things worse. You will just become frustrated and the depressed person will feel even guiltier. However, there are ways you

can make things a little easier for the depressed person and not aggravate the disease.

- 🗣️ **Do listen to the depressed person.** They will usually want the opportunity to talk about their feelings. You don't need to have any answers, or try to solve their problems, just listen.
- 🗣️ **Don't criticize.** Depressed people are very vulnerable to criticism. They are already experiencing feelings of inadequacy and failure. Any criticism may cause them to fall apart, becoming even more indecisive or inept.
- 🗣️ **Don't personalize.** Don't take your loved one's depression personally and don't start feeling responsible for the person's happiness or unhappiness.
- 🗣️ **Don't push.** The depressed person may feel unmotivated and antisocial. A little nudge can help, but don't get overly upset if the person doesn't want to go for a walk or attend a dinner party. Go alone.
- 🗣️ **Don't patronize or baby the depressed person.** Appreciate that depressed people are not at their best and try to help out, but don't take over for them.
- 🗣️ **Don't lose your temper.** A little bit of patience can go a long way. There may be a lot of friction when talking to depressed people because they are irritable and tend to be inhibited.
- 🗣️ **Don't feel guilty.** You have not caused this disease.





 **Do be supportive.** As with any other disease, a certain amount of sympathetic understanding can help to speed up the patient's recovery process.

What about my needs?

Living with a depressed person is very frustrating. Spouses or family members of depressed patients can become hostile, cynical, and are themselves at risk for depression. It is important that you take care of yourself and maintain a life independent of the depressed person. Here are some tips to keep your own life stable:

 **Do take time out for yourself.** Three times a week do something that's self-indulgent and doesn't involve the patient. For example, treat yourself to dinner and a movie alone or with a friend. Don't feel it's necessary to spend all of your free time with the depressed person. Allow time for your hobbies or just spending time alone.

 **Do plenty of exercise, eat right, and get enough sleep.** You won't be of use to anyone if you let your own health or morale slide.

