



Depression resources

ASSISTING PATIENTS WITH DEPRESSION

To help support your treatment of your patient, we have provided patient resources below. You can also find additional information at Humana's website: [Humana.com/provider/medical-resources/clinical/depression-screening-resources](https://www.humana.com/provider/medical-resources/clinical/depression-screening-resources).

For your patients:

- List of symptoms
- Contact information in case of emergencies

You also may want to consider providing other resources to your patient, such as:

- **Service coordination**, including transportation coordination, appointment scheduling
- **Referral to community or external resources**
(e.g., Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous, consumer credit counseling, victim assistance, etc.)

United Way	www.unitedway.org
Alcoholics Anonymous	www.aa.org
National Alliance on Mental Illness	www.nami.org

- Two handouts on mental health and depression, strategies to improve mood and information on antidepressants

Keep your spirits up when depression has you feeling down

You don't always have control over the things that make you unhappy, but there are things you can do to help improve your mood.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is more than just feeling sad or blue; it causes severe symptoms that affect how you feel, think and handle daily activities. Depression is not a sign of weakness or a character flaw. It's a real illness, and it often requires treatment to get better.¹

JUST BLUE, OR ARE YOU DEPRESSED?

Talk to your healthcare provider if you have any of the following symptoms:¹

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness or negativity
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in your sleeping habits
- Changes in appetite or unintended weight changes
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems
- Decreased energy or feelings of fatigue



Sadness is normal, depression is not. You can take steps to help improve your mental health.

Mental health and depression

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL SAD OR DEPRESSED?

Scientists believe that people feel sad or depressed when certain chemicals in the brain get out of balance.

Many things can trigger an imbalance, including:¹

- Conditions like heart disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or a major surgery, heart attack or stroke
- Life changes such as the death of a loved one, loss of independence, retirement, relocation or general health problems
- Family, work or financial stress

IMPROVE YOUR MOOD

Talk to your healthcare provider if you feel sad, depressed, downhearted or blue. He or she can make sure you do not have a medical condition that is causing these feelings and offer other suggestions to help improve your mood. **You can also try some of these ideas:**



Exercise your mind and your body. Staying active is thought to mimic some of the effects of antidepressant medications by releasing feel-good endorphins—these are natural brain chemicals that boost your sense of well-being.²



Get out and about. Getting together with others can give you a lift.³ Visit local parks with a friend. That way you can socialize while maintaining a safe, healthy distance.



Get in a good routine. Follow a daily routine of activities, including set times for meals, snacks, exercise and chatting with a friend. Go to bed and wake up at about the same time each day, and try to get about 7–9 hours of sleep each night.



Manage stress in a healthy way. Chronic stress can lead to depression.⁴ Try to find relaxing activities you enjoy, such as yoga, tai chi and meditation. Avoid using drugs and alcohol.



Talk it out. Talking to a trained counselor might help you feel better. You might only need to meet with a counselor for a few weeks or a couple of months. Ask your doctor or spiritual leader to suggest someone.

Talk to your healthcare provider

Sometimes self-help strategies alone can't lift a person's mood. If you're feeling down and can't seem to shake it, make an appointment with your healthcare provider. Say, for example, "I have been feeling down for more than two weeks. This is not my usual self, and I'm wondering if I could be depressed. Can you check that for me?" Your doctor will know what to do.

Be prepared to discuss your symptoms and personal information that may play a role in your mood, and be open to trying different treatment options until you find what works for you.

If antidepressant medicine is part of your treatment plan, be sure to take all of your medication as directed. Always consult with your doctor before you stop any medication, and discuss any side effects or concerns you have.

Find your smile again, look for help with depression

Depression is a treatable illness. You can get help to improve the way you feel, think and handle daily activities.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a type of mood disorder that doesn't have a single cause, but many factors may contribute, including:¹

- Trauma
- Genetics
- Life situations
- Brain changes
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Other medical conditions

Without treatment, the frequency and severity of symptoms tend to increase over time.¹

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

Talk to your healthcare provider if you've been feeling any of the following symptoms:²

- Persistent sad, anxious or "empty" mood
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping or changes in sleeping habits
- Appetite and/or unintended weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness, irritability
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems



Your healthcare provider can develop a treatment plan for you.

Strategies to fight depression

DEPRESSION IS TREATABLE

Depression is mainly treated with medication and/or psychotherapy, but some people benefit from complementary therapies too.²

You may need to try different treatments or treatment combinations until you find what works for you.

HOW ANTIDEPRESSANTS WORK

Antidepressants primarily work by affecting three neurotransmitters in the brain: serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine.³ These are chemical messengers that carry signals between brain cells.

- **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs)** are the most popular types of antidepressants.³ They work by blocking the reabsorption of serotonin in the brain, making more of it available.
- **Serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs)** help increase the amount of norepinephrine and serotonin in the brain.
- **Norepinephrine and dopamine reuptake inhibitors (NDRIs)** help increase levels of norepinephrine and dopamine in the brain.

These three classes of drugs are popular because they do not produce as many side effects as older classes of antidepressants, and they seem to help with a wide-ranging group of depressive (and anxiety) disorders.³ However, older antidepressants, like tricyclics, tetracyclics and monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) may be the best medication for some people.

You and your healthcare provider can work together to find the right medicine for you. When prescribing an antidepressant, your healthcare provider may consider:

- Your particular symptoms
- Possible side effects
- Whether it worked for you or a close relative
- How it interacts with other medicines
- Other health conditions
- Cost and insurance coverage

HELPFUL TIPS FOR TAKING AN ANTIDEPRESSANT

If your healthcare provider has prescribed an antidepressant, it's important to:



Take your medicine as prescribed.

Don't stop taking your medicine without talking to your healthcare provider.



Watch out for side effects.

Consider exploring other options if the medicine is causing bothersome side effects.



Be patient.

Keep in mind that it may take time for the medicine to take effect.

Strategies to fight depression

PSYCHOTHERAPY

There are several types of therapies that may help treat depression.^{2,4} Therapists may use a single approach or a combination of many.

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)** may help a person with depression change negative thought patterns and behaviors. It helps individuals learn to recognize negative thoughts and understand effective coping strategies.
- **Interpersonal therapy (IPT)** attempts to help individuals improve their personal relationships that may be causing or worsening depression.
- **Problem-solving therapy (PST)** aims to help individuals cope with stressful life events. It employs a step-by-step process for identifying problems and coming up with realistic solutions.

FINDING A THERAPIST

When choosing a therapist or psychiatrist, it's important to find someone you have a connection with. There are many ways to find a therapist or psychiatrist, including:

- **Word of mouth.** Ask your healthcare provider for a referral, and talk to family and friends.
- **National mental health organizations.** These organizations often have referral lists of licensed credentialed providers.
- **Other resources.** Check out local senior centers, religious organizations and mental health clinics.

Questions to ask

When looking for a therapist, consider asking the following questions:⁵

- What are your credentials and experience? Do you have a specialty?
- What approach will you take to help me? Do you practice a particular type of therapy? Is your approach evidence-based?
- Do you recommend a specific time frame or number of sessions? What happens if you or I feel that I'm not starting to feel better?

LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO HELP TREAT DEPRESSION

In addition to medicines and therapy, simple lifestyle changes can be powerful tools in the treatment of depression.



Get plenty of exercise. Exercise seems to mimic some of the effects of antidepressant medications by releasing feel-good endorphins (natural brain chemicals that enhance your sense of well-being).⁶



Eat a healthy diet. Your brain—like the rest of your body—functions best on a high-quality diet that delivers a steady stream of nutrients. Research has shown that the Mediterranean diet may help support mental health.⁷ It emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, fish and seafood, healthy fats (like olive oil), and a moderate amount of red wine. It limits foods like red meat and butter, which are high in saturated fats.

Strategies to fight depression

LIFESTYLE CHANGES TO HELP TREAT DEPRESSION (CONTINUED)



Maintain a strong social support system. Socializing helps keep the brain healthy and happy.



Get enough sleep. Treat sleep as a non-negotiable part of your health and do everything you can to get 7–8 hours each night.



Reduce and manage stress. Relaxing activities like yoga, meditation and tai chi may help relieve some stress.



Avoid using drugs and alcohol. These coping mechanisms often lead to deeper feelings of despair.

Sources

¹National Alliance on Mental Illness

www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Depression

²National Institute of Mental Health

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>

³National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/mental-health-medications/index.shtml

⁴National Alliance on Mental Illness

www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Depression/Treatment

⁵National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/psychotherapies/index.shtml

⁶Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495

⁷Sanchez-Villegas et al. (2015). A longitudinal analysis of diet quality scores and the risk of incident depression in the SUN Project. *BMC Medicine*. 13: 197.

⁸ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/chronic-illness-mental-health/index.shtml>

⁹ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/drugs-and-medications/is-your-medication-making-you-depressed>

Humana is a PPO, HMO or PFFS Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in any Humana plan depends on contract renewal. This is for informational purposes only and does not replace treatment or advice from a healthcare professional. If you have questions, please talk with your doctor. Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise program or making any changes to your diet.

Signs and symptoms

If you are experiencing several of these symptoms, please contact your healthcare provider.



RECOGNIZING DEPRESSION

Major depression is **2 or more weeks** of several of the following symptoms:

Loss of interest and pleasure in activities you used to enjoy	Feeling sad, irritable or empty
Restless, unable to sit still or feeling slow	Feeling hopeless
Thoughts of death or harming oneself	Changes in appetite or weight loss or gain
Change in sleep patterns—being unable to sleep or sleeping too much	Problems concentrating, thinking, remembering or making decisions
Loss of energy or feeling tired all of the time	Loss of interest in sex
Unexplained or increased or aggravated aches and pains	Increased use of alcohol or drugs
Neglected personal care	Decreased socializing
Increased or exacerbated physical health issues	Loss of self-worth



MEDICAL CONDITIONS THAT CAN WORSEN OR CAUSE DEPRESSION⁸

Parkinson's disease	Stroke
Heart disease	Thyroid conditions
Cancer	Diabetes
Vitamin B deficiency	Dementia
Lupus	Multiple sclerosis



MEDICATIONS THAT CAN WORSEN OR CAUSE DEPRESSION⁹

Certain medications can affect or lead to depression. Please speak with your provider about this possibility if you think this could be happening to you.

Blood pressure medications (clonidine)	Beta blockers
High-cholesterol drugs	Tranquilizers
Calcium channel blockers	Medication for Parkinson's disease
Sleeping pills	Heart drugs containing reserpine
Ulcer medications	Steroids
Painkillers and arthritis drugs	Estrogens

