

Major Depression

Depression is a medical illness that affects how you feel, think and behave. It can lead to many problems in your life and can negatively affect your health. You may have trouble doing normal day-to-day activities, and depression may make you feel as if life isn't worth living. Depression isn't a weakness and isn't something that you can simply "snap out" of. It's a real illness that often needs long-term treatment, just like diabetes or high blood pressure. Never be embarrassed to discuss your need for treatment with family or friends.

goals

The treatment of depression is divided into two stages:

1. The first 8–12 weeks is the acute stage. During this time, the goal is to get rid of your symptoms and help you to return to your daily activities.
2. The next 6–24 months or longer is the maintenance stage. The goal is to get you back to the quality of life you had before the depression and to stop depression symptoms from returning.

It will be important to see your doctor often (every few weeks), especially during the acute phase, so that he/ she can check how you're responding to treatment, if you're having any side effects and if you've had any difficulty sticking to your treatment plan.

Treatment Choices

There are many ways to treat depression, including counseling, drug therapy, light therapy and alternative therapies. Which treatment you use will depend on many things, like which one you prefer, how severe your depression is,

other medical conditions you might have, cost and availability. You may be on more than one treatment at the same time.

If you and your doctor choose medication, finding the right one will probably take some trial and error. Try to be patient. Some medications take eight weeks or longer to reach their full benefit. During that time you might feel certain side effects (like nausea, headaches or diarrhea) as your body gets used to the medication. If you do have side effects, remember that they're probably temporary and will go away in a week or two.

Counseling with a mental health provider (like a social worker or psychologist) is another way to treat depression. One of the best is cognitive behavioral therapy (or CBT) which helps you look at negative thoughts and behaviors, and replace them with healthy, positive ones.

You and your doctor may also consider other options that can be used alone or added to another treatment:

- Light therapy: where you sit near a specially-made light box
- Herbal remedies like omega-3 fish oil supplements
- Regular exercise, yoga

Adapted from: 1) Depression (major depression). Mayo Clinic. 2012. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression/DS00175> 2) Katon P, Ciechanowski P. Depression treatment options for adults (Beyond the Basics). UpToDate. 2012. <http://www.uptodate.com/>