
Using Medications Successfully

An ICP Booklet

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What is Depression?

Depression is a response to problems in living. When we become exhausted in our efforts to cope with life, we begin to experience symptoms of depression. Following is a list of common symptoms of depression. Make a check in the box beside any symptom you have had almost daily for the past two weeks.

1. ☐ Anger or irritability
2. ☐ Sadness
3. ☐ Sleeping too much or too little
4. ☐ A lack of interest in others and in activities you usually enjoy
5. ☐ Guilt, self critical thoughts, feeling inadequate or worthless
6. ☐ Feeling tired most of the time
7. ☐ Concentration difficulties
8. ☐ Appetite change — eating significantly more or less
9. ☐ Feeling very “slowed down” or very “speeded up”
10. ☐ More aches and pain
11. ☐ Thoughts of suicide or death in general

Total Symptoms:_____

The Cycle of Depression

People become depressed for many reasons. This booklet describes strategies for using medications successfully to alleviate symptoms of depression. Most often, depression is related to stressful life circumstances, such as marital problems, death of a loved one, loss of a job, or a child leaving home. Depression may also be related to physical problems such as chronic pain or medical illness.

Depression Occurs In Three Ways

The Body Feels Depressed

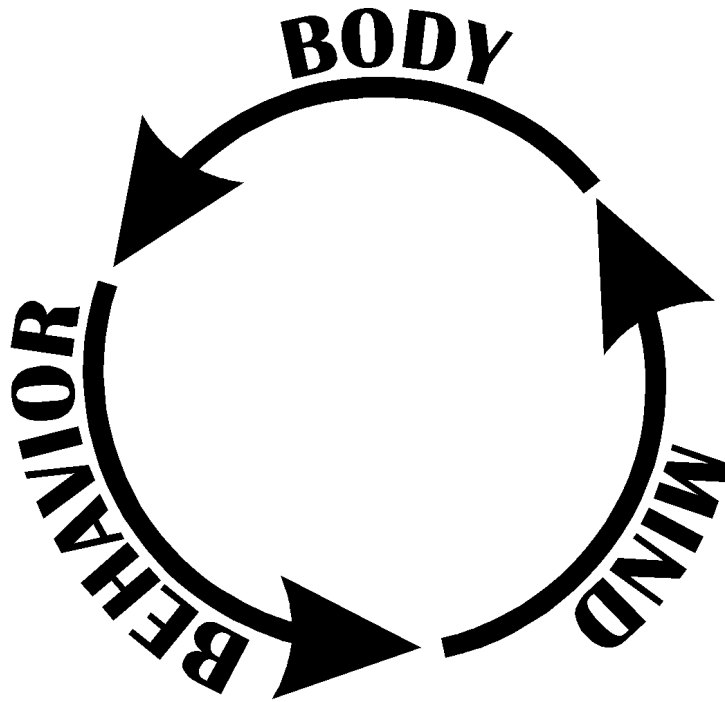
When the body is depressed, a person sleeps poorly, eats differently, has less energy, struggles with concentration, and has more aches and pains.

Behavior Is Depressed

When behavior is depressed, a person does much less than usual. She/he talks less, produces less, and socializes less.

The Mind Is Depressed

When the mind is depressed, thinking changes. A depressed person experiences more intensely negative and painful thoughts about the past, the present and the future.



A person's body, behavior, and thoughts interact continuously. Once depression becomes a problem, this interaction may lead to a "downward spiral" in mood and hopefulness. Two courses of action help reverse the downward direction and create a "positive spiral."

1. *Use of Medications*

Medications may help you to feel better. Antidepressant medications restore the presence of neurotransmitter substances that become depleted by stress. Medications may work somewhat slowly. Therefore, it is best to use medications in combination with behavioral planning and use of coping strategies. **This booklet will help you use medications successfully.** Antidepressant therapy and

behavioral health planning are complementary treatments for depression and anxiety.

2. *Strategic Use of Coping Strategies*

Use of active coping strategies helps you reverse the downward spiral of depression. When you address life problems with effective strategies, you have more opportunities to create positive conditions in your life context.

Make a concerted effort to work with your health care provider in planning medication treatment and skillful use of coping strategies. You will soon be feeling better.

Using Medications Successfully

There are four important areas to address in order to use medications successfully. They include:

1. Your Past Experiences with Medications
2. Your Beliefs about Medications
3. Your Knowledge about Medications
4. Your Ability to Anticipate and Plan for Problems in Using Medications

This booklet will help you assess and prepare for success in each of these key areas.

Your Past Experiences with Medications

Take a moment to recall your past experiences with use of medications for depression and anxiety.

1. Have you ever used a medicine to help alleviate symptoms of depression or anxiety? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. Try to recall the medication name, dosage, and length of treatment.

Name	Dose	Length of Treatment

1. Also, recall any side effects you had with this medication. How much did they trouble you?

Side Effect	Bothered A Little	Bothered A Lot
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. How much did you benefit from use of medication when you tried medication before?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None	A Little	Some	Quite A Lot	Very Much

This information will be helpful to you and your provider in making a decision about medication use and selection of a specific medication.

If you did have a limited response to medication treatment or experienced bothersome side effects in the past, you may still be a candidate for medication treatment. Several new types of antidepressant medications have become available in recent years. New medications are equally effective and have fewer side effects.

Your Beliefs about Medications

Your beliefs have a significant impact on your success in using antidepressant medications. Take stock of your beliefs right now. Mark an “X” by any of the following statements that you believe.

- ☐ I'll be the one to get terrible side effects.
- ☐ My family would not want me to use medications for depression and anxiety.
- ☐ These types of medications are overused.
- ☐ I should be able to get over my problems without taking medicine.
- ☐ I'll get addicted.

If you believe any of these statements, discuss the belief with your health care provider. She/he may be able to provide you with additional information to help you re-evaluate beliefs which might make medication use more difficult for you.

Your Knowledge about Medications

You are much more likely to succeed in antidepressant treatment when you have accurate information about all aspects of medication use. Please review the following details and discuss any questions you have with your health care providers.

Starting medication . . .

Start your medicine as soon as it is prescribed. The sooner you start, the sooner you will experience the desired benefits.

Remembering to take medicine . . .

Take your medicine at a certain time of day every day. During the first several weeks, you may want to leave yourself several reminder notes. Some people use a behavioral hygiene task, such as teeth brushing, as a cue to take their medication. Also, some people may want to leave an extra bottle of medication in a desk drawer at work in the event that they forget to take the medicine at home.

Deciding how to take the medication . . .

Some medications are best taken in one dose, while others are best divided into several doses during the day. Some medications cause drowsiness, while others are more activating. Medications with a sedative effect are taken at night, and activating medications are taken in the morning.

Carrying on with other activities . . .

You may continue with your normal activities while taking antidepressant medications. If you do notice minor sedation or sleepiness in starting a medicine, avoid driving or carrying out hazardous activities. Sleepiness will usually diminish. If it does not, talk with your provider about a medication change.

Taking antidepressants with other medications . . .

You may take antidepressants with most other types of medications. However, do talk with your provider about the compatibility of antidepressant medications with other medications you are taking.

Taking antidepressant medications and consuming alcohol . . .

Do not drink alcohol while taking antidepressant medications.

Increasing medication dose . . .

Increase your medication dose according to the directions of your provider. In starting some antidepressant medications, you start with small doses initially and increase gradually. Do not worry that you are “taking too many pills.” Your provider is prescribing a slow increase in dose in order to help you avoid side effects. After you reach your “therapeutic dose,” your provider will probably prescribe tablets that are larger in dosage, which then allows you to take fewer tablets.

Continuing to take the medication . . .

Take the medicine until you and your provider decide that you are ready to stop the medicine. In most cases, your provider will ask you to take the medicine for at least four months after you reach a therapeutic dose. Do not stop taking the medicine because you feel better. Wait and plan *how and when* to stop with your provider.

Your Ability to Anticipate and Plan for Problems in Using Medications

Most antidepressant medications have mild side effects. The side effects are usually temporary and diminish or disappear during the first few weeks of treatment. **If you experience side effects that are more severe, call your doctor.** She/he will probably suggest one or more of the following strategies:

- Change the time that you take the medicine
- Change the dose of the medicine
- Use a remedy for the side effect
- Add a second medication
- Change to a different medication

The following table summarizes common side effects and possible remedies or strategies for coping with side effects. Most medications have only one or two of the side effects listed in this table.

Common Side Effects and Remedies	
Dry Mouth	Drink plenty of water. Chew sugarless gum. Use sugarless gum drops.
Constipation	Eat more fiber-rich foods. Take a stool softener.
Drowsiness	Get fresh air and take frequent walks. Try taking your medicine earlier in the evening, or if you're taking your medicine in the day ask your doctor if you can take it at night.
Wakefulness	Take medications early in the day. Learn more about insomnia. Take a warm bath and have a light snack before bed. Avoid exercising vigorously late in the evening.
Blurred Vision	Remind yourself that this will be a temporary difficulty. Talk with your doctor if it persists.
Dizziness	Stand up slowly. Drink plenty of fluids. If you are worried, call your doctor.
Feeling Speeded Up	Tell yourself, "This will go away within three to five days." If it does not, call your doctor or nurse.
Sexual Problem	Talk with your doctor. A change in medications or a medication holiday may help.
Nausea or Appetite Loss	Take the medicine with food. Prepare food so that it is appetizing and colorful. Eat small healthy meals.

Remember to Ask for Help

Starting antidepressant treatment is not easy. Remember to ask for the support of your health care team. Take this booklet with you to your next visit with your health care provider. She/he is prepared to skillfully address your concerns about use of medications and plan successful treatment with you.

If you want more information on using behavioral strategies to alleviate depression and anxiety consider reading *Living Life Well: New Strategies for Hard Times* by Patricia Robinson, Ph.D.

