Depression: patient education guide

Symptoms, assessment, safety and care discussions

General health information only. This page does not diagnose a condition or replace an assessment by a qualified clinician.

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What depression can involve

Depression can affect mood, interest, thinking, sleep, appetite, energy, physical symptoms, relationships and daily function. Symptoms are clues, not a diagnosis. A clinician considers duration, impact, safety, medical history, medicines, substances and related conditions.

Common presentations

• Low, empty, numb or irritable mood; less interest or pleasure; guilt or hopelessness.

• Low energy, sleep or appetite change, poor concentration, slowed or restless movement, pain or digestive symptoms.

• Withdrawal, anger, increased substance use or changes in work, school, caregiving or self-care.

• Thoughts of death, suicide or self-harm require a direct safety conversation.

Assessment and related conditions

Assessment may include your story, function, safety, past episodes, bipolar symptoms, anxiety, trauma, sleep, substances, medicines, pregnancy or postpartum status and physical health. Clinicians may consider grief, anxiety, bipolar disorder, psychosis, thyroid disease, anemia, sleep disorders, chronic pain and medication effects.

Care discussions

• Psychotherapy, supported self-management, peer/community programs, family support, activity planning, medication classes or specialist care may be discussed.

• Medication classes are discussion topics only. Benefits, side effects, interactions, pregnancy considerations and follow-up differ.

• Small routines, sleep support, regular food and hydration, movement and safe connection may be discussed as practical supports.

Urgent help

If you may act on thoughts of suicide, cannot keep yourself safe, have made an attempt, or someone is in immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In Canada, call or text 988 for suicide crisis support. A crisis line does not replace emergency services when danger is immediate.

Bring to a visit

• A private timeline of mood, sleep, energy, appetite, concentration and function.

• Medicine, supplement, substance and allergy list; relevant medical and family history.

• Past mental-health treatment and what helped or did not; pregnancy, postpartum or breastfeeding status when relevant.

• A trusted support person if you would like someone with you.

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