

SELF CARE

It is important for individuals recovering from depression to take good care of themselves. We recommend that you:

- Take your medications as prescribed. If they are causing unpleasant side effects or do not seem to be helping, share this information with your provider. If the medication has proven effective and you are no longer experiencing symptoms of depression, discuss with your provider when and how you should discontinue the medication.
- Make good use of your psychotherapy sessions. If you feel they are not helping, share this with your therapist, along with any other concerns or questions you might have.
- Establish healthy sleeping habits. Going to bed at the same time every night and getting up at the same time every morning is generally helpful. If your medication seems to be interfering with your sleep, mention this to your provider. He or she may be able to adjust the dosage, have you take it at a different time, or switch you to a different medication.
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet and try not to skip meals. You may want to check with your provider for specific suggestions, but healthy diets generally emphasize fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.
- Make some form of physical activity a part of your daily routine. You can start small – perhaps just a slow walk around the block. You may want to enlist the support of a family member or friend who can accompany you on your walks or other activities.
- Stay connected with others – but be selective. Spend time with individuals who understand what you are going through and who want to

be supportive. As much as possible, avoid or limit your time with those who are critical or judgmental.

- If you are feeling overwhelmed by tasks at work or at home, break them down into smaller ones and set priorities. And don't be reluctant to ask for assistance.
- Build into your daily schedule some time devoted to doing something that you know you can enjoy. That could be listening to music, reading a book, or just watching a particular television program.
- Do not self-medicate with alcohol or with drugs not prescribed for you. They can interfere with the medications you have been prescribed and may even make your depression worse.
- Postpone major life decisions until you are feeling better and more confident about yourself and the future.
- Be patient and gentle on yourself. Depression is a serious illness, and it will take time to recover.

HELPING A LOVED ONE WHO IS DEPRESSED

The National Institute of Mental Health offers the following suggestions:

- Offer support, understanding, patience, and encouragement
- Never ignore comments about suicide, and report them to your loved one's health care provider or therapist
- Invite him or her out for walks, outings, and other activities
- Help him or her adhere to the treatment plan, such as setting reminders to take prescribed medications
- Help him or her by ensuring that he or she has transportation to therapy appointments
- Remind him or her that, with time and treatment, the depression will lift

We also suggest that you:

- Educate yourself about depression and the treatment(s) being recommended
- Take the initiative to check on your loved one regularly – do not wait for him or her to call you
- Stay in touch with other family members and friends who are involved in supporting your loved one

SELF CARE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

It can be very difficult to live with or care for someone who is seriously depressed. In many respects, it's like being with a different person. So much about the individual you have known and enjoyed seems to have disappeared. And it's not unusual to feel personally rejected when your loved one talks about how absolutely nothing in life is good. It can be especially painful when depression affects intimate relationships, as it often does. It's also easy for family members to blame themselves for the problems their loved one is experiencing, even though they are doing their best to support that person. This is why it is important for people who are living with or caring for depressed individuals to make a special effort to also care for themselves.

- Develop your own support system. This is the time to reach out to a good friend who can support you and help you with a “reality check” when your loved one is saying or doing hurtful things.
- Consider joining a support group, such as the ones offered by NAMI for individuals who have a loved one with a mental health condition.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle, including balanced meals, regular physical activities or exercise, and enough sleep.
- Set aside time for yourself as much as possible and continue with some of the activities you find rewarding and renewing.

Remember, if you do not take good care of yourself, you are not going to be able to take good care of your loved one.

