



## Tips for Managing Illness-Related Depression

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**Don't be too hard on yourself.** There is no reason to feel guilty, embarrassed or ashamed about being depressed. Depression is not something you can “snap out of” and it isn't a sign of personal failure. Let your health care team know if your mood begins to interfere with your ability to participate in your daily activities.

**Do some self-exploration.** It is common to feel depressed and not even know why. Try to identify what triggers depression symptoms for you. Make a list of your symptoms and when they occur, and share this information with your health care team. Also, think about your life as a whole. Something in your past may be affecting you now more than you realize.

**Share with your care team.** Be open with your health care team about how you are feeling. Don't be afraid that your medical treatments will be discontinued or that your doctor will think poorly of you if you talk about your depression. Being able to talk with your health care team can help you feel more comfortable and confident throughout your medical care journey.

**Pay attention to warning signs.** Work with your health care team to make a plan so you know what to do if symptoms of depression occur. Contact your doctor if you notice any changes in your symptoms or in how you feel. You may want to ask your loved ones to watch out for warning signs as well.

**Become an active participant in your recovery.** Depression is often characterized by feelings of helplessness. You can counteract these feelings by becoming actively involved in your recovery. Discuss your treatment options with your health care team so you feel more in control. And, stick to your treatment plan. Take your medications as directed and don't skip therapy sessions.

**Stay focused on your goals.** Recovery from depression is an ongoing process. It can help to set small, reasonable goals for each day, such as taking a walk, making a phone call, having lunch with a friend, reading a chapter of a book, etc. Finding small things in life to look forward to each day can help you feel more productive and motivated.

**Confide in others.** Depression can cause you to withdraw from others and turn inward, which can then deepen the depression. It's better to express your feelings rather than hold them in. Aside from family and friends, support groups can help you talk about your concerns, develop coping skills, and learn from others who are dealing with illness and depression.

**Exercise regularly.** Although exercise may seem overwhelming, especially if you are undergoing medical treatments, physical activity can have positive effects on your mood and well being. Choose activities you enjoy, such as walking, swimming, gardening, dancing, etc. A physical therapist can help develop a personalized exercise plan for you.

**Eat a healthy diet.** A well-balanced diet, including the right amounts of fruits, vegetables, protein, and carbohydrates, can positively influence your mood. Try frequent, small meals throughout the day and avoid alcohol and caffeine. Dietitians can help develop a meal plan that is right for you.

**Nurture your spirituality.** Prayer, Bible study, spending time in nature, writing in a journal, volunteer work, and meeting with a spiritual counselor are just a few of the ways you can nurture your spiritual well being. All of these things can help you feel more hopeful and promote a more positive mood.

**Stay connected.** Serious illnesses are a heavy burden for both patients and their caregivers. Try not to isolate yourself from your loved ones, who may be feeling depressed as well. You and your loved ones can face this together, as a team. Participating in enjoyable activities together can help you both move forward and find a positive outlook.

*This information is neither intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical guidance.  
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