

Patient Handout: Understanding, Managing, and Treating Major Depression

What is Major Depression?

Major depression, also known as major depressive disorder, is a mood disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed, and difficulty carrying out daily activities. It's more than just feeling "down" – it's a serious condition that affects how you think, feel, and handle daily activities.

Common Stimulants

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Irritability
- Feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Changes in sleep – sleeping too much or insomnia
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts

How is Major Depression Treated?

Major depression is typically treated with a combination of psychotherapy, medications (like SSRIs, SNRIs, or atypical antidepressants), and lifestyle changes.

Managing Major Depression

- **Stay Active:** Regular physical activity can boost your mood and act as a natural antidepressant.
- **Eat Healthy:** A balanced diet can improve your physical health and have positive effects on your mood and energy levels.

- **Get Enough Sleep:** Poor sleep can exacerbate depressive symptoms. Establish a regular sleep schedule and practice good sleep hygiene.
- **Avoid Alcohol and Drugs:** These substances can worsen depression and might also interfere with the effects of prescribed medication.
- **Stay Connected:** Stay in touch with family and friends. Isolation can worsen feelings of depression. Consider joining a support group.

Prognosis for Major Depression

With proper treatment, the majority of people with depression will overcome their symptoms. However, major depression can be a recurring disorder. Some people might only have one depressive episode in their life, but most will have several. Regular treatment, including taking prescribed medication and following a treatment plan, can prevent or reduce the number of depressive episodes.

Resources for Help and Additional Information

- **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH):** Provides information and resources about depression. www.nimh.nih.gov
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):** Offers education programs and support groups for individuals and families. www.nami.org
- **American Psychiatric Association (APA):** Offers resources on understanding depression. www.psychiatry.org
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** Provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, as well as prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones. **Just dial 988**

This handout is intended to provide a general overview of major depression and does not cover all potential aspects of the condition.