

# Understanding depression



Family and friends  
can make a difference

# Helping a loved one cope with depression

**F**amily members and friends have an important role to play in the life of someone being treated for depression. For example, people close to the person with depression are often the first to notice the positive effects of therapy. If you see improvement, be sure to tell your loved one. Letting them know that you see positive change can encourage them to continue their treatment and reach their goal of getting back to feeling the way they used to.

Here are some other “DOs” and “DON’Ts”:

## DO...

- Remember that depression is a real but very treatable illness, and that the improvement process takes time.
- Encourage your loved one to speak openly with their doctor.
- Readjust household responsibilities; help simplify your loved one’s life.
- Help motivate them to sleep, eat, and exercise regularly.
- Be aware of worsening of symptoms, suicidal thoughts or behavior, or unusual changes in behavior. Call the doctor if you have any questions or concerns.
- Remind them to be patient, and remember to be patient yourself.
- Find the right balance between your needs and theirs.
- Stress the importance of taking medication exactly as prescribed.
- Remind them to refill their prescription before running out, to avoid an interruption in treatment.




## DON'T...

- Criticize or blame them.
- Treat them as if they can no longer function.
- Exclude them from family matters.
- Think depression is something you can fix.
- Expect immediate results.
- Expect your loved one to become instantly happy.
- Forget to take time for yourself and your own interests.
- Blame yourself for your loved one’s depression.

One very important thing to remember is that the person with depression may not always accept your help or support. Understand that rejecting help is often part of the illness, and don’t take it personally.

# More ways you can help



In addition to the “DOs” and “DON’Ts” on the previous pages, here are some other things you can do to help someone you care about get past the symptoms of depression and help keep them from coming back.

**Encourage** them to keep a journal to track their symptoms, progress, and any side effects they may experience. You can keep a journal, too. Take note of the changes you see as they experience improvements. Often a friend or loved one will notice changes before the depressed patient does.

**Remind** them of the importance of open communication with their doctor. Patients should take their medication exactly as instructed. They should also follow up with their doctor regularly to discuss how they feel and how to stay on the right track.

**Be aware** that it is not uncommon for depression symptoms to return even after treatment. You can help by watching for any signs that symptoms have returned and by encouraging your loved one to speak with their doctor at the first sign that symptoms are coming back.

**Educate** yourself about depression and the range of available treatments. Understanding what your loved one is going through and having the tools to help can be instrumental.

Most important, **be supportive**. Working together to get past the symptoms of depression may make both of you stronger.