



Patient education: Depression during and after pregnancy – Discharge instructions (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

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What are discharge instructions?

Discharge instructions are information about how to take care of yourself after getting medical care for a health problem.

What is depression?

Depression is a disorder that makes you sad, but it is different than normal sadness. For many people, pregnancy is a happy time. But some people have depression while they are pregnant or after they have their baby:

- **Antenatal depression** – This is the medical term for depression **during** pregnancy. "Antenatal" means the period of time before a baby is born.
- **Postpartum depression** – This is a kind of depression that some people get **after** having a baby. "Postpartum" means the period of time shortly after giving birth. But depression can affect all parents, not just the person who gives birth.

Depression can make it hard to eat, sleep, work, or enjoy life. It can also make it hard to care for yourself and your baby or other children.

Get help right away if you are thinking of hurting or killing yourself!

Sometimes, people with depression think of hurting or killing themselves. If you ever feel like you might hurt yourself or someone else, help is available:

- In the US, contact the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:
 - To speak to someone, call or text **988**.
 - To talk to someone online, go to www.988lifeline.org/chat.
 - Call your doctor or nurse, and tell them that it is an emergency.
 - Call for an ambulance (in the US and Canada, call 9-1-1).
 - Go to the emergency department at the nearest hospital.
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How do I care for myself at home?

Make sure that you understand exactly what you need to do to care for yourself. Ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

You should also:

- Take your medicines exactly as your doctor tells you to, so you get the correct amount of each medicine.
 - Some people find it helpful to use reminders or a weekly pill box.
 - If you are having side effects, talk to your doctor. Many side effects go away after a few days or weeks.
- Go to all of your appointments. This might include counseling sessions, support groups, or medical appointments.
- Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Try to get regular physical activity when you are able. Even gentle forms of activity, like walking, are good for your health.
- Ask a trusted friend or family member to help with the baby, if possible. They can also help with things like cooking, cleaning, and other chores. Having help, especially at night so you can sleep, might help you be able to cope better.
- Try to get at least 6 to 8 hours of sleep every night if possible. This can be very hard to do with a new baby, but it is important to get as much sleep as you can. When possible, rest or nap when your baby sleeps.

- Speak with trusted family or friends about your depression and how they can help.
 - Find healthy ways to handle stress, like focusing on doing only the tasks that are most essential. It can also help to stay connected to others. Deep breathing, relaxation exercises, meditation, and activities like yoga or tai chi can also help you handle stress. Try to be gentle with yourself.
 - Try to eat a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. This can help improve your overall health.
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What follow-up care do I need?

Depression needs to be watched closely. Your doctor or nurse might ask you to make a follow-up appointment to check on your progress. Go to these appointments.

When should I call the doctor?

Call for advice if:

- Your depression does not get better within 1 or 2 weeks.
 - Your depression is getting worse.
 - Your family or friends say that they are worried about you.
 - You continue to have problems eating or sleeping.
 - You are having trouble functioning at work, at home, or in school.
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More on this topic

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[Patient education: Depression in adults \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Depression in adults – Discharge instructions \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Premenstrual syndrome \(PMS\) and premenstrual dysphoric disorder \(PMDD\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Medicines for depression \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Electroconvulsive therapy \(ECT\) \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Post-traumatic stress disorder \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: When you have depression and another health problem \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Serotonin syndrome \(The Basics\)](#)

Patient education: Depression in adults (Beyond the Basics)

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Patient education: Bipolar disorder (Beyond the Basics)

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