



Patient education: Depression in adults – 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. Depression can make it hard for you to work, study, do everyday tasks, or interact with others.

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.

How do I care for myself at home?

Ask the doctor or nurse what you should do when you go 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, 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 of use.
- Go to all of your appointments. This might include counseling sessions, support groups, or appointments for medical treatments.
- Avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Try to get regular physical activity or exercise. Even gentle forms of activity, like walking, are good for your health.
- Find healthy ways to handle stress, like talking to others or hobbies you enjoy. Relaxation exercises, meditation, and activities like yoga or tai chi can help you handle stress.
- Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep every night. If you have trouble sleeping, you can do things to improve your sleep habits. For example, you can:
 - Avoid drinking alcohol or caffeine in the late afternoon or evening.
 - Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
 - Limit your naps during the day, and don't nap for more than 30 minutes at a time.
- Speak with trusted family or friends about your depression and how they can help.
- 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.

What follow-up care do I need?

Depression needs to be watched closely. Your doctor or nurse should 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:

- You have ongoing depression that 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, home, or school.
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More on this topic

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

[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: Depression during and after pregnancy \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Depression during and after pregnancy – Discharge instructions \(The Basics\)](#)

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

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

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

[Patient education: Depression treatment options for adults \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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

[Patient education: Bipolar disorder \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

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