

## Treatments for Depression

The most commonly used treatments for clinical depression are antidepressant medications, psychotherapy (talk therapy), or preferably, a combination of the two. Which is the right treatment for an individual depends on the nature and severity of the depression. In mild or moderate depression, one or both of these treatments may be useful, while in severe or incapacitating depression, medication is generally recommended as an essential step in treatment.

### ➤ Medications Used To Treat Depression

There are several types of antidepressant medications used to treat depression. Each acts on different chemical pathways in the brain that relate to mood and other depressive symptoms. Antidepressant medications are not habit-forming. However, as with any type of medication, they have to be carefully monitored to ensure the correct dose is given. Sometimes, a doctor will try a variety of antidepressants before finding the most effective medication or combination of medications. Antidepressants must be taken daily for at least six consecutive months. The dosage must sometimes be increased to be effective. Although some improvement may be achieved in the first few weeks, antidepressant medications must be taken regularly for four to six weeks (in some cases, up to eight weeks) before becoming effective.

Never mix antidepressants with medications of any kind – prescribed or over-the-counter – without consulting a doctor. This is true because some medications can interact negatively with antidepressants. Some, like alcohol or street drugs, reduce the effectiveness of antidepressants and should be avoided. If you are addicted to alcohol or street drugs, ask your doctor for help.

Anti-anxiety medications are sometimes used with antidepressants. However, they are also effective when taken alone for a depressive disorder. Stimulants, such as amphetamines, are occasionally prescribed for depression in medically ill individuals, or when an immediate response is necessary.

### Side Effects of Antidepressants

Antidepressants may cause mild, but usually temporary, side effects. Though annoying, they typically are not serious. However, you should immediately report any unusual reactions or side-effects to your doctor. The most common side effects of are: headache, upset stomach, nervousness, insomnia, agitation or sexual problems.

### ➤ Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy or talk therapy can help those people suffering from

depression. Some patients do well with short-term therapies (10 to 20 weeks), while others require treatment lasting a year or more. However, many health insurance companies limit the number of psychotherapy visits, which often determines the length of treatment. Talking therapies help people gain insight and resolve problems through verbal give-and-take with the therapist. Behavioral therapies help people learn how to obtain greater satisfaction through their own actions and to unlearn the thoughts and behavioral patterns that contribute to, or result from, their depression.

Research has shown that two short-term therapies: interpersonal and cognitive/behavioral, are helpful for some types of depression. Interpersonal therapy focuses on the person's distorted personal relationships that both cause and increase the depression. Cognitive/behavioral therapy helps people change negative styles of thinking and behaving often associated with depression.

Psychodynamic therapies, which are sometimes used to treat depressed patients, focus on resolving internal conflicts. In general, severe depression, especially when it's recurrent, requires medication along with psychotherapy for the best outcome.