

Educate Your Patient

Patient Journey Roadmap for Major Depressive Disorder

np psych
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Major depressive disorder (MDD) is a severe mental health condition affecting millions of people worldwide. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) estimates that in 2020, about 21 million adults in the United States experienced a major depressive episode.¹ Managing MDD can feel difficult, but don't let that discourage you from seeking help.² Understanding MDD and being prepared for your treatment journey can help you take steps toward improving your mental health and quality of life. The first step in this journey is recognizing and accepting your symptoms.

The next part toward recovery begins with a careful diagnosis by a healthcare professional. A mental health professional conducts a thorough evaluation and review of a patient's medical and psychiatric history to diagnose depression. Early diagnosis, intervention, and appropriate management can help lead symptoms into remission, prevent relapse, and reduce the overall burden of MDD.³ This is why it is important to seek care soon after you identify depressive symptoms.

Recognizing the Symptoms of MDD

The symptoms of depression can vary from one person to the next, and so can the severity of these symptoms. You do not have to experience ALL of these symptoms to be diagnosed with MDD (Figure 1).⁴



Figure 1. American Psychiatric Association *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.).

What Treatment Options Are Available?

Finding a treatment option that is right for you can be difficult, but don't give up! It is important to recognize that many patients may not respond completely to the first antidepressant they try. In fact, a study found that after initial treatment with an antidepressant, approximately 50% of patients still had symptoms of depression.⁵

The Treatment Journey

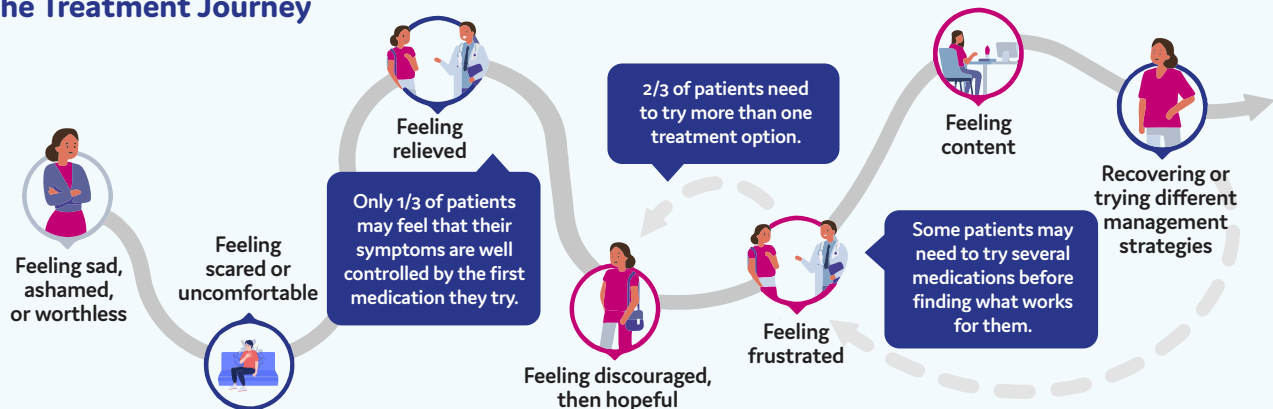


Figure 2. Gaynes BN, Rush AJ, Trivedi MH, et al. *Cleve Clin J Med*. 2008;75(1):57-66.

While treatment journeys can differ from patient to patient, for many, it is not a straight line (Figure 2). Healthcare providers may recommend multiple treatment options if you are not able to manage your symptoms with the first, second, or even third medication you try. In some cases, combining 2 medications or combining medication with psychotherapy may be considered. There are several types of medication and therapy choices available.⁶

This resource is intended for educational purposes only and is intended for US health care professionals who may choose to share this handout with patients or their caregivers. This handout does not replace proper medical care. Please reach out to your health care provider with any questions or concerns you might have. Reach out to your family or friends for help if you have thoughts of harming yourself or others or call the National Suicide Prevention Helpline for information at 1-800-273-8255.

Medication Therapy

Antidepressants are medications that are commonly used to treat depression. They are thought to work by altering chemicals in the brain that regulate mood.⁷ These medications may take anywhere from 4 to 8 weeks for patients to start to see improvement in their symptoms.⁸

Psychotherapy

A trained mental health professional can provide psychotherapy, which involves counseling or talk therapy, to treat mental illness.² Two types of psychotherapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT), have been shown to be effective in treating depression.⁸

Discussing your specific needs with a mental health professional to determine the best treatment options is key for your recovery journey. Prepare for your next appointment by asking questions to gain a better understanding of how you can benefit from these treatment options and how they can potentially work to help you in your journey.

Questions to Ask Your Mental Health Professional About Treatment⁹





1. How does this treatment affect my brain, and what does it impact?
2. When will I start to feel better, and when will my symptoms improve with this treatment?
3. What are some potential side effects of this treatment, and how can we address them?
4. What is the normal dose range for this medication?
5. Is this treatment often used for my condition?
6. What is the next step if this treatment does not work?
7. How will this treatment interact with my other treatments for different conditions?
8. Who do I contact in the event of an emergency?

Self Care

Coping With Stress

Serious life events and social stressors have been shown to contribute to depressive symptoms.⁸ Consider sharing significant life events or stressors with your mental health professional when you're ready. This can help identify triggers and improve your understanding of your condition (Figure 3).

You are particularly susceptible to stress when you:

-  Get insufficient or poor quality sleep
-  Lack adequate social support
-  Are going through a significant life event
-  Are sick
-  Have a poor diet

Strategies for minimizing stress include:









-  Identify your triggers
-  Manage your time
-  Practice relaxing/relaxation techniques
-  Perform daily exercise
-  Eat healthy
-  Prioritize getting enough sleep
-  Stay away from drugs and alcohol
-  Speak with someone

Figure 3. National Alliance on Mental Illness. Managing Stress. 2023. <https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Individuals-with-Mental-Illness/Taking-Care-of-Your-Body/Managing-Stress>


Support Groups

You do not have to face depression alone. Support groups can be a lifeline for you if you are struggling with depression. These groups may provide a safe space for you to share your experiences, receive emotional support, and learn coping skills from others who understand what you are going through. Find a support group near you.¹⁰


Getting Help: Information and Resources¹¹⁻¹⁴




Mood Tracker



Preparing for a Crisis



Life Action Plan



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

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References

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