

Antidepressant treatment

If depression is making your life very difficult, your doctor may suggest a course of antidepressants. Studies have shown that antidepressants are effective in treating depression. However, it may take several weeks before you notice an improvement, so it is important to keep taking the medication even if there is no effect at first.

Antidepressants can have some side effects, though these are usually mild and tend to wear off as treatment goes on.

Your doctor should discuss the risks and benefits of different treatment options with you, and regularly assess your mood and symptoms.

Further information

Cicely Saunders Institute

Macmillan Information and Support Centre for patients with progressive illness and their families

Tel: 0203 299 5229

www.csi.kcl.ac.uk/support

Depression Alliance

Information, support and understanding for people who suffer with depression.

Tel: 0845 123 23 20

www.depressionalliance.org

Samaritans

Support to those in distress who feel suicidal or despairing.

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

www.samaritans.org

Hospice Information

An information service where you can find information about local hospice and palliative care services.

Tel: 0870 903 3903

www.hospiceinformation.info

Macmillan Cancer Line

Specialist advisors able to offer confidential advice and help you find the information you need.

Tel: 0808 808 0000



Depression in Advanced Disease



Patient summary of new European Guidelines on the management of depression in palliative care

Understandably, many people with a life-threatening illness feel down sometimes. There is a lot to come to terms with and it is normal to feel sad. For some people these feelings don't go away or they get worse, and this can lead to depression.

What is it like to be depressed?

Depression feels worse and lasts longer than the normal sadness we all experience from time to time.

The symptoms include:

- Feeling low most of the day nearly every day
- Losing interest in things you used to enjoy
- Not wanting to be around other people
- Finding it harder to make decisions
- Feeling useless or worthless
- Feeling that life is not worth living
- Changes to sleep patterns and appetite, fatigue and trouble concentrating

Preventing depression

Living with advanced disease can be difficult and distressing. If you are finding it hard to cope, talk to someone close to you or to a healthcare professional. Your doctor or nurse can help by listening to your concerns and working out ways to make life easier. They will be able to make sure that your physical symptoms (e.g. pain, fatigue, breathlessness) are being managed effectively. They can also provide information about local services and support available to you (e.g. counselling, self-help and community groups, complementary therapies, financial, practical and spiritual support).

Your doctor or nurse should regularly ask you about your mood. Some people find it difficult to talk about their depression, so your privacy, dignity and confidentiality should always be respected.

If the doctor or nurse feels you are depressed they may offer more specific approaches to help you feel and cope better.

What type of treatment you are offered will depend on your preference, the type of physical illness you have, and how severe your depression is.

Talking treatments

There are a number of different psychological therapies that are effective in treating depression. For example:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) helps people overcome negative and unhelpful ways of thinking
- Problem-solving therapy helps people identify and plan how to cope with specific problems
- Interpersonal therapy helps people resolve difficulties in their personal relationships