

What is depression and how can I get better? (Segment C)

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Getting The Most From Your Medical Care

It is very important to create and maintain good communication with your medical providers. Caring for depression can require numerous visits, so your relationship with your providers may be a long-term one. For a relationship to be successful it requires effort from everyone. For your provider to determine the best treatments for depression, he or she must know many things about you and your life. You should feel comfortable talking about your fears, asking questions (even if you think it is a “stupid question”), and working with your provider to develop a treatment plan that will satisfy both of you. If you don’t feel comfortable, you probably want to consider changing providers.

Many providers and patients are on a tight schedule and you both may feel rushed. One way to get more from your visit with your provider is by taking “P.A.R.T.” ** P.A.R.T. stands for Prepare, Ask, Repeat and Take Action. We hope it will help you and your provider communicate.

Prepare

Prior to your appointment (either in-person or telephone appointment) with your provider, prepare an “agenda” that highlights the reasons for the visit. Write down a list of your questions and concerns so you can remember them. Identify items you feel are most important to discuss during the appointment (mark these items with a star or check mark). At the beginning of the appointment tell your provider your concerns, perhaps show him or her the list and point out your

Although this workbook focuses on depression, the P.A.R.T. exercise can be used for any medical issue, any time you plan to see or speak with your provider.

On page 26 there is a “Medical Visit Agenda Form” to help you take P.A.R.T.

** Based on the method described in *Living A Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions*, by Kate Lon’g © 1994

priorities. If you wait until the end of your appointment to discuss items on the list, there may not be enough time.

When you tell your provider your thoughts, feelings, and fears, be as open as possible. He or she cannot read your mind, so you must be honest and forthcoming. If you are worried about something, tell your physician. Your doctor can only help you with a problem if he or she knows about it. Similarly, if you were not able to follow the provider's instructions or had problems with a prior treatment, tell him or her so that changes can be made. Take notes about your symptoms or concerns so you can give your provider a detailed history of the problem. If you have a new symptom, be sure to record it. Make a note about when it began, how long it lasts, how often it occurs, where it is located on your body, what makes it better or worse, whether you have made any recent changes to your diet, medications, or exercise, and so on.

It is perfectly fine to say something like: "I am worried about how this illness will affect my family" or "This scares me because it is like what my sister experienced when she took this medication."

Ask

Asking questions is a very important part of improving communication with your provider. You may want to ask questions about diagnosis, tests, treatments, and follow-up. Again, you may find it helpful to write down your questions in advance. Also be sure to ask if and when you should have a follow-up appointment and what you should do in the meantime. When your provider answers your questions, take notes and/or bring a friend or relative to listen and remember your provider's advice.



For questions related to a diagnosis you might want to ask: “What is wrong? What is the cause? How can I prevent future occurrences?” For questions related to treatment, you may want to ask, “What changes in my lifestyle do I need to make? What are the side effects, risks, and benefits of medication? What can I expect from therapy?”

Reppeat

Repeat the important points back to your provider. Repeating ensures that you understand the information and gives your provider a chance to correct any misunderstandings. If you are confused or unsure about something, tell the provider that you would like it restated.

By repeating important points, you can double check that you really understand your provider’s advice.

Take Action

Before the end of the appointment, make sure you understand what to do next. If necessary, ask your provider to write down instructions or give you a reference for more information (such as a pamphlet, book, or videotape about the illness or new treatment). If you think that you can't or won't follow the provider's instructions, be sure to let him or her know. You might want to say something like: "Last time I took that medication, it made me so sleepy I really don't want to take it again. Is there another medicine I can take instead?" Remember, your doctor cannot help if he or she does not know about the problem. Furthermore, your provider's advice may not work if you aren't able to follow it. Once you understand the instructions, follow them very carefully. Call your provider if you have concerns or want to make any changes.

If your provider knows why you can't or won't follow the directions, he or she may be able to give you some alternative suggestions or make some changes to accommodate your needs.

? On the next page we provided a "Medical Visit Agenda" form to help you take P.A.R.T. You may remember Mr. Jones, whom we introduced to you on pages 1-2. Mr. Jones filled out a medical visit agenda before his follow-up appointment with Dr. Cort. We have included it on page 27 as an example of how to take P.A.R.T. We hope that using this form and following the directions listed above will help you get the most out of your medical care visits.

Medical Visit Agenda

Fill out parts 1, 2 and 3 the day before your appointment. Use extra paper or the back of this form if you need more space. Place a check mark (✓) or star (★) by your most important concerns; the ones you want to be sure to discuss at your appointment. Be sure to bring this form with you to your appointment!

Part 1: My concern(s) (if possible include “what, where, when, how and why” information about your concern(s)):

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

Part 2: Questions to ask:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Part 3: Write down the important information from your visit with your provider.

Medical Visit Agenda

Fill out parts 1, 2 and 3 the day before your appointment. Use extra paper or the back of this form if you need more space. Place a check mark (a) or star (★) by your most important concerns; the ones you want to be sure to discuss at your appointment. Be sure to bring this form with you to your appointment!

Part 1 My concern(s) (if possible include “what, where, when, how and why” information about your concern(s)):

- ★ 1. I’m already taking medication for my heart and I wonder if it is safe to take anti-depressants.
- ★ 2. I’m worried about side effects.
- 3. When I travel I often forget to take my medications.
- 4. As I feel better, I don’t like to take medication.
- ★ 5. I don’t sleep as well as I used to.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

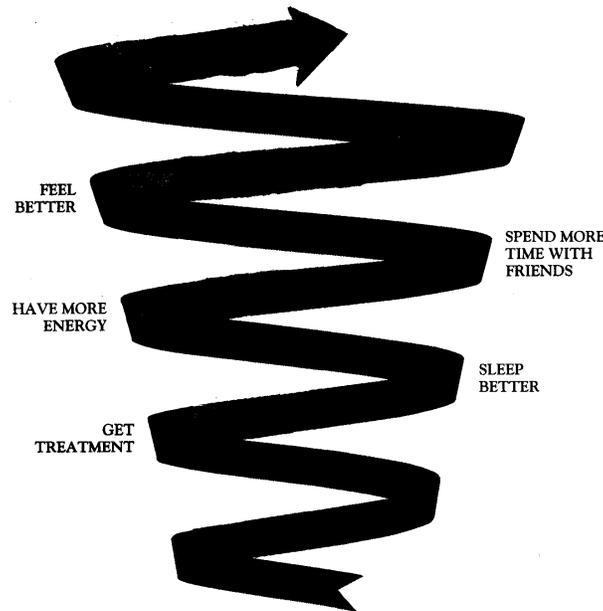
Part 2 Questions to ask:

- 1. Can I take anti-depressants along with my heart medication?
- 2. What can I do that will help with my side effects of dry mouth and not being able to fall asleep?
- 3.
- 4.

Part 3 Write down the important information from your visit with your provider.

Doing More Pleasant Activities

As shown in the Cycle of Depression on page 9, thought and feelings are affected by activities. Many people feel depressed when they are less active. On page 7 the negative spiral diagram showed you that people tend to stop doing pleasant activities when they feel depressed. Fortunately, as shown below, there is also a positive spiral.*



An important part of feeling better comes from increasing pleasant activities. Pleasant activities can help you recover from both large and small stresses. Doing pleasant activities will usually make you feel better. By scheduling and participating in activities that you find enjoyable, you may find that you feel less depressed. Everyone has his or her own ideas and opinions about which activities are pleasant. It is important for you to think about the activities that are pleasant and enjoyable to YOU. They do not have to be expensive or time consuming! They can be as simple as going to the park, listening to a radio show, or reading the comics.

* From Depression: *Self-Care Companion for Better Living*, Time-Life Medical © 1996.

Sometimes when people return to pleasant activities they haven't done in a while they find the activity less satisfying than they anticipated. You might find yourself thinking something like "This activity isn't as great as I remember." Thoughts like this can be very depressing! But if you compare the enjoyment you felt from the activity to how you would have felt otherwise, you might decide that it actually was a good thing you did the activity. You may think to yourself: "It is good that I went to the library. I did enjoy looking at the magazines, and it was better than sitting in front of the TV feeling glum. Just getting up and moving around made me feel better than sitting around all day."



? The purpose of this exercise is to identify activities you have enjoyed in the past and to plan enjoyable things you can do today and tomorrow. Use the next page to plan some pleasant activities. If you need help thinking of activities, some suggestions are listed on page 32. Mr. Jones's form is given as an example on page 31.

Pleasant Activities Planner

1. Some pleasurable activities I have enjoyed in the past are... (make a list)

2. What would be enjoyable for me to do right now?

3. What small thing will I do TODAY that will be an accomplishment?

4. What pleasant activity can I do tomorrow? What, where, when, for how long?

5. What social activities can I arrange this week? Date and time? With whom?

6. Do I need help with these activities? If so, who can help me with them?

7. With whom would I enjoy doing these activities?

Pleasant Activities Planner

1. Some pleasurable activities I have enjoyed in the past are... (make a list)

Golf, reading, bridge club, church socials, listening to the radio,
walking to the park

2. What would be enjoyable for me to do right now?

It would be nice to play some golf, but it's cold outside. Instead, I will
go outside for a few minutes, walk around the block, and get some fresh air.

3. What small thing will I do today that will be an accomplishment?

I will listen to the radio show I enjoy.

4. What pleasant activity can I do tomorrow? What, where, when, for how long?

I will walk to the park down the street. When I wake up tomorrow morning,
I will walk to the park 4 blocks away. On the way back I will stop for a cup
of coffee.

5. What social activities can I arrange this week? Date and time? With whom?

I will host the bridge club at my house on Friday evening.

6. Do I need help with these activities? If so, who can help me with them?

I will ask my daughter to make snacks for bridge club and my neighbor
if he can help me set up the table and chairs.

7. With whom would I enjoy doing these activities?

It would be nice if my daughter walked with me to the park.

Activity Ideas List

Check off any activities you have enjoyed in the past or would like to do in the future.

- Attend a sporting event
- Do arts, crafts, or carpentry
- Do a crossword or other puzzles
- Exercise or stretch
- Garden or take care of house plants
- Go to church or other religious place
- Go to the library
- Go to the park
- Invite a friend over for a visit
- Join a book or card club
- Keep a journal
- Listen to music or the radio
- Phone a friend or relative
- Plan an outing, trip or vacation
- Play an instrument
- Play cards or game
- Play with pets
- Read a novel or magazine
- Read the comics or newspaper
- See a movie, or rent a video
- Share a meal with a friend
- Sing
- Start a project
- Take a class
- Take a drive
- Take a walk
- Visit a community or senior center
- Visit family or friends
- Volunteer at church, charity, hospital or political organization
- Watch a sunset or sunrise
- Write a poem or short story
- Write letter to a friend or relative
- Other activities _____

Getting Involved with Your Treatment

? Look back over the previous sections. Take a few minutes to sit down and write in the spaces below some of your questions and thoughts. Look at the sample on the next page to see how Mr. Jones filled out the form. You may wish to bring this page (or the whole manual) with you to your next appointment.

Write down the questions that you have about depression. Use another sheet if you need more space.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

List your three biggest concerns (For example, changing behaviors, effect on family, a new medication's effect on other medical conditions)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List three of your goals for your treatment. (For example, improve sleep habits, increase pleasant activities, learn to decrease negative thinking)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List three things you can do that will aid in your treatment and recovery. (For example, I can tell my provider my concerns, go to all appointments, try new treatments for at least 4 weeks)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Getting Involved with Your Treatment

? Look back over the previous sections. Take a few minutes to sit down and write in the spaces below some of your questions and thoughts. You may wish to bring this page (or the whole manual) with you to your next appointment.

Write down the questions that you have about depression. Use another sheet if you need more space.

1. Do I have other treatment options besides medication?

2. How long will it take for my anti-depressant medication to start working?

3. Will I have side effects? If so, what can I expect? Will they improve over time?

List your three biggest concerns (For example, changing behaviors, effect on family, a new medication's effect on other medical conditions)

1. **Heart medication and depression medication**
2. **Being able to remember when to take my medications**
3. **Having negative side effects**

List three of your goals for your treatment. (For example, improve sleep habits, increase pleasant activities, learn to decrease negative thinking)

1. **I want to continue working.**
2. **I want to exercise 3 times a week.**
3. **I want to teach my family about my illness.**

List three things you can do that will aid in your treatment and recovery. (For example, I can tell my provider my concerns, go to all appointments, try new treatments for at least 4 weeks)

1. **I can ask lots of questions.**
2. **I will follow the directions for my medication.**
3. **I can ask for support from my family and friends.**

Review

? When you have finished reading Part I, you may find it useful to answer the following questions for review.

1. What is depression? _____

2. What causes depression? _____

3. What are some depression symptoms that I have? _____

4. Am I ready to make some changes to assist in my recovery? _____

5. What can I do to get started? _____

6. What are treatments for depression? _____

7. What are some things I can do to get started on my recovery? _____

8. How can I get the most out of my medical care? _____
