

# CHAMPS

Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services



## Depression: Things You Can Do to Help

*(Part 2 of a three-part series)*

### **The first step in treatment is to get a definite diagnosis.**

As a friend or support person help the individual find or schedule an appointment with a physician for a definitive diagnosis. Adequate treatment requires a thorough evaluation. Whenever possible accompany the depressed person to the physician visit(s) and offer to be a “second set of ears”.

### **Understand the treatments prescribed.**

Treatment of depression depends on the severity of the symptoms, the individual's health history and the response to the prescribed therapy. Medications are commonly prescribed to correct chemical imbalances in the brain and may be used alone or in combination with other types of therapy.

As one ages the response to a medication may vary due to changes in the way the body absorbs, distributes, metabolizes and eliminates drugs. Therefore it **may take time** for the most effective medication(s) to be identified and for the effectiveness to be evaluated.

- Learn and **report the side effects** of prescribed medications **to the physician.**
- Check with your physician or pharmacist before combining antidepressant medications with over-the-counter drugs, vitamins or herbal products. (They can have a chemical reaction in the body with your prescribed medications.)
- Keep the prescribing physician informed of progress or lack of response to therapy so adjustments can be made; **never suddenly discontinue taking a medication.**
- Take medications in the **prescribed dosage** at the **same time daily** and **avoid** the use of **alcohol.**
- Seek immediate assistance if you think the person is suicidal!

**Safety and security** are basic needs for all individuals. Be sure the person has a secure environment to live in. Additionally, offer the individual emotional support and hope. Keep the person grounded in the reality of a situation without being critical and demeaning. **Love and belonging** are also basic needs therefore, continuing a relationship with an individual through the thick and thin of their illness is important.

Encourage eating **healthy foods** (fruits, vegetables, protein, low-fat, high fiber) to help in the overall treatment of depression. The physician may suggest watching your sugar level. The amount of carbohydrate foods

suggested may be dependent on the need to lose or gain weight.

Get active. **Exercise daily**, preferably in the fresh air, to improve your mood by increasing chemicals in your body known as endorphins. This can be an opportune time to do something with a friend. For those with limited mobility, the use of stretch bands and lifting light weights (bottles of water, canned goods) may be an alternative to walking.

Light has been discovered to have a connection with depression therefore being outside or in the sunlight can be beneficial. When inside, sit near a sunny window and

replace fluorescent bulbs with full spectrum light bulbs.

Getting too much or too little sleep is a sign of depression. If either of these is present, discuss the problem with the physician or therapist. Finding the right balance is important. Going to bed and getting up at a scheduled time is an important component of establishing a daily routine. Listening to music, simple deep breathing exercises, meditation and prayer can help to lull an individual into a gentle sleep.

Apathy and lack of motivation may require the individual to have assistance to establish goals and a timeline to accomplish them. Friends or family can help in this process. Goal setting can be as simple as setting up a daily routine. Example: 8:30 A.M. Get up, dress and eat

breakfast, 9:30 A.M. Make bed and go for daily walk with friend, 10:30 A.M. Clean bedroom, 1 P.M. grocery shopping, etc. In the beginning, it may be necessary to help the individual to do each of these things until such time as their medications and therapy become effective.

Goals can be more inclusive to include what an individual wants to do. This could include personal, educational, financial, family or spiritual goal setting. This type of goal setting would take some introspection and could be overwhelming for a depressed individual if undertaken all at once. It might be more realistic to focus on a daily routine and establish ways to keep the person connected to friends, family and social groups. The important thing is to keep encouraging the individual as they make progress.

### **Keep a written record of the treatment plan.**

Be sure to include the depressed person in the planning process. It is important for the individual to feel in control of their life. Support persons can volunteer to work cooperatively with the physician, therapist and individual to become familiar with the treatment plan established by the health care providers. This could include a record of symptoms that would indicate the individual needs assistance in making decisions. It is vitally important for specific physicians, family members and support persons to be in place to make decisions when the individual is unable or unwilling to function independently.

- **Medications prescribed.** Keep a log of each medication (name of drug, dosage, and time to be taken daily) prescribed and the response or lack of response to therapy. This can be helpful to any health care provider it is necessary to consult with over the course of time.
- **Healthcare Providers.** Log the name of physician(s) and therapist with date, time, and place of follow up appointments.
- **Support.** Log the contact information for person(s) to be notified in the event of an escalation of symptoms.

### **Look for Part 3 in series: The Church Can Keep People Connected**

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