Dear Member,

We (Community Care Behavioral Health Organization) have prepared this newsletter for you and your family. It includes information that we hope you find helpful. It is our goal to help individuals like you understand depression and the ways it can be treated. This newsletter provides important information about ways to help individuals with depression be more successful.

If you have any questions or need assistance in any way please do not hesitate to call the toll-free customer services number for your county listed in the table on the next page. A customer service representative is available to assist you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Para recibir esta información en español, por favor llame 1.866.229.3187.

With best regards,
Community Care
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Understanding Depression

Depression, the most common mental health condition in the U.S., can be hard to talk about. This newsletter describes the symptoms of depression and late-life depression. It includes information about therapy, medicine for treating depression, and tips to help you talk to your doctor or therapist. You might be depressed if you feel sad and have negative thoughts for a long time. These thoughts make it hard to feel good about yourself. When you are depressed, you may have problems with your family, friends, or coworkers.

What causes depression? There are different causes for depression. Some common causes are:

- Stressful events like the death of someone you love, a divorce, or problems at work. Everyone feels sad when these things happen. Feeling sad for a long time could be depression.

- Psychological problems with other people or upsetting situations. It can be hard to talk to other people or to get close to them. You can get depressed if you have trouble showing anger.

- Family members with depression.

- Some medical problems. Your doctor will decide if any medical problems are causing depression.

- Some medicines, drugs, or alcohol problems. Your doctor will decide if any prescription medicines can be causing depression. Using or withdrawing from alcohol or drugs can cause depression.

Talk with your doctor and learn about treatment. Writing things down can help you remember to tell your doctor. There are different kinds of depression, but they all have the same main symptoms. Tell your doctor or therapist how you have been feeling. They will know what kind of depression you have. Your doctor can answer your questions about medicine for depression. Tell your doctor how you feel and if you have any side effects. Talk to your doctor before taking any new medicine. Do not take any over-the-counter medicine, herbs, or vitamins without first talking to your doctor or the pharmacist.
• **Depressed mood.** Depressed people feel sad and hopeless. They might feel like giving up, cry a lot, feel empty, or have no feelings. Some people may become irritable or angry.

• **Less interest or pleasure in activities.** Many depressed people do not like the activities they used to enjoy. They do not want to be with other people. They might lose interest in sex. They might not take care of how they dress or look. They might not keep themselves clean.

• **Problems sleeping.** Some depressed people have trouble falling asleep. Other people cannot sleep all through the night or wake up too early in the morning. Some people sleep a lot.

• **Feeling tired.** Even with enough sleep, some depressed people feel tired all the time. Because they feel tired, they do not have much energy.

• **Feeling nervous or slowed-down.** Some people feel nervous or restless because of depression. Other people slow down.

• **Feeling guilty and useless.** Depressed people feel bad about themselves. They are critical of themselves. They feel guilty for things that are not their fault. They often feel useless.

• **Problems with memory.** Depressed people often forget even simple things. They have trouble concentrating. It is hard for them to make decisions.

• **Appetite change.** Some people with depression want to eat more and may gain weight. Some people with depression want to eat less and may lose weight.

• **Suicidal thoughts, plans, or attempts.** Depressed people might think about killing or hurting themselves. If you are thinking about killing or hurting yourself, call your doctor or therapist right away, or go to the nearest emergency room.

• **Alcohol and drug use.** Overusing alcohol or drugs might be a symptom that a person is depressed. Talk with your doctor or therapist about your use of drugs and alcohol.

• **Physical symptoms.** Some people with depression have physical symptoms. Headaches, stomach pain, and feeling sick are common.

**TIPS**

Starting treatment is sometimes the hardest part. It is common to treat depression with antidepressant medicine. This can help you get better faster.
Starting treatment can mean trying something new. This might be hard. You might be nervous. Treatment is usually medicine, talk therapy, or both.

- **Antidepressant medication.** Depression is often treated with medicine. It can take longer than you might think to start working. Medicine works best if you take it just as your doctor prescribes. It is important to keep taking medicine even if you begin to feel better.

- **Why am I taking this medicine?** The doctor gives you medicine to help your symptoms. If you were depressed in the past and took medicine, the doctor considers how well it worked. The doctor might give you the same medicine or another one. People do not all respond the same way to medicines. Medicine that works well for one person might not work best for you. Different medicines have different doses. Taking a higher dose of medicine than someone else does not mean that you are more depressed. Never share medicines with another person.

- **What about side effects?** It can take time to get used to taking medicine. Your doctor will give you a low dose of medicine at first. At the start, your doctor should see you more often to see how the medicine is working. The doctor might change how much medicine you take after you say how you feel. Medicines can make you feel things like a dry mouth or even dizziness. These are called side effects. Do not stop taking your medicine. Most side effects go away after a little while.

- **When will I feel better?** It might take up to 6 weeks to begin to feel better. You might have side effects from the medicine before you feel better. Work with your doctor to find the right medicine for you.

- **What about talk therapy?** Talking to a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other therapist (this is called psychotherapy) can help you understand your feelings. Changing how you think and what you do may give you more control over your life. You might feel better as soon as you start talking about your problems and symptoms, or it might take a few weeks or longer to feel better. The most important part of your treatment is your relationship with your therapist. Tell your therapist how you feel and what parts of therapy work for you.

- **What should I know about early treatment?** You require the most monitoring by your doctor and therapist for the first three months. If you are taking medicine for depression, weekly visits with your therapist and at least monthly appointments with your doctor are recommended during the first three months. Take your medicine as prescribed. Your normal energy level may get better before your mood gets better. This can put you at risk for making poor decisions. Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns about your symptoms.
In the first weeks or months of treatment, it can seem that you will never feel better. Be patient. Learn about your medicine. Understand how combining talk therapy can help. The more you know, the better your treatment will work for you.

What are antidepressants and how do they work?
Chemicals send messages between the cells in your brain. If there is a low amount of one of these chemicals, your brain cannot function the way it should. When this happens, you may get depressed. Antidepressant medicine helps with these brain chemicals. It also repairs the brain’s ability to send messages between cells. This happens in different ways. That is why there are different medicines.

How can antidepressants help me?
Antidepressant medicine can help you feel better. It can help you feel less nervous, guilty, hopeless, and sad. It can give you more energy and make it easier for you to pay attention. Medicine can help you enjoy the things you used to like to do. It can help you sleep better and eat right. You cannot get addicted to your antidepressant medicine.

How often do I need to take the antidepressants? And, for how long?
The first three months of treatment require the most monitoring by your doctor and therapist. It is important to take your medicine just as your doctor has prescribed. It is common for people to stay on medicine for six months or more. Take your medicine for as long as your doctor tells you. Take your medicine the way the doctor tells you. It works best this way. Usually you will take medicine every day. Tell your doctor how the medicine makes you feel. This helps the doctor treat your depression quickly and safely.
Can I take other medicines?
Ask your doctor or pharmacist before taking over-the-counter medicine, including herbs or vitamins. Some drugs, although safe when taken alone, can, if taken with others, cause severe and dangerous side effects. Be sure to tell all your health professionals—including your dentist and other medical specialists—about the medicines you are taking.

What about side effects?
Your medicine may give you side effects. Side effects usually only last a short time. The most common side effects are a dry mouth, feeling tired, and problems with sex. Many side effects will go away 2–6 weeks after starting medicine. Tell your doctor if you have any side effects, such as feeling nervous, feeling restless, blurry vision, feeling tired, dizziness, headaches, trouble urinating, trouble sleeping, nausea, constipation, sweating, tremors, dry mouth, or weight gain.

Can I change medicines if I’m having side effects?
Talk with your doctor about your side effects. Do not change your medicine on your own. Do not stop taking your medicine. This is dangerous. It can make you feel worse. If you do not like the side effects, you and your doctor can make changes. Your doctor might add a second medicine or change the dose of your medicine. Changing your medicine is a decision that you and your doctor should make together.

Can I drink alcohol?
It is important not to drink alcohol.

Medicine cannot help with family or relationship problems or the loss of someone you love. It cannot help with things like money trouble. That is why talk therapy is important. Talk therapy can help with these problems.
Talk therapy takes time. You must be active in your therapy. Talk about what makes you depressed. Do the following things to help to make therapy a success:

- **Make a commitment to therapy.** Talk with your therapist about what makes you depressed. Some things are hard or painful to talk about, but talking about them may help you feel better.

- **Keep your therapy appointments.** Therapy will not help if you don’t go to sessions.

- **Think about your therapy before and after each session.** Each day think about what you talked about in your last therapy session and what you want to talk about in your next therapy session.

- **Write down your thoughts between sessions.** This can help you and your therapist see what makes you depressed.

- **Do any homework that your therapist gives you.** Homework can help you sort out your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

- **Tell your therapist about your thoughts, feelings, and actions.** Talking with your therapist is the most important part of therapy. Be honest. Do not hide information from your therapist. Tell your therapist your problems and what you do about them. Tell him or her about the other people in your life. Use the symptoms listed in this newsletter to talk with your therapist about how you feel. Then your therapist can decide the best way to treat your depression.

- **Tell your therapist if you are uncomfortable or unhappy with your therapy.** Depression can make you feel hopeless. Tell your therapist if this is how you are feeling. You and your therapist can work on a treatment plan that helps you feel hopeful.

**TIPS**

You will feel better if you are open and honest with your therapist. More than one person may be treating you. Tell each person, including your primary care doctor, about the others. Tell all of them about your medicines. The people treating you should be able to talk to each other. If you sign a consent form to release information, all of the people treating you can talk to each other, which will improve your treatment.

Your relationship with your therapist can be an example of a successful relationship. Two people are involved in therapy. This is a relationship. Problems you have with other people may also come up in your relationship with your therapist. You and your therapist can use the feelings that come up between you to understand how you think and feel in other relationships.
As you continue in treatment, your symptoms of depression should start to go away. Your mood will get better. You will have more energy. It will be easier to live a normal life again.

Because you feel better, you might think your depression is cured when, in fact, it may not be. Stay in treatment and keep taking your medicine. If you do not, the symptoms of depression might come back. This is called a relapse. Relapses are discouraging because the symptoms that you worked hard to get rid of return. Many times treatment must start all over again. About half the people with depression have it only once. For the rest, the symptoms of depression usually go away for some time and then come back. People who have had depression more than once might need treatment and medicine for a longer time.

When will I recover?
Recovery happens in stages. When your symptoms start to get better you might feel like your previous self and think your depression is gone. When this happens, it is important to continue your medicine and therapy. If you do not, the symptoms can return. You can have a relapse.

When will I stop talk therapy?
You and your therapist should talk about when to stop talk therapy. Decide together how you have gotten better and what needs more work. You and your therapist should both agree that you no longer need therapy before you stop. As a first step in stopping therapy, your therapist might tell you that you need fewer sessions. Try to use what you have learned in therapy even if you are not going as often. If you need it, your therapist can start treatment with you again.

When will I stop taking medicine?
Ask your doctor. People being treated for depression usually take medicine for many months. Some stay on medicine for 6 months or more. Take your medicine for as long as your doctor tells you to help avoid a relapse. It is important to successfully recover from depression. Take your medicine as the doctor tells you even when you start to feel better. A pill box can remind you which medicine to take each day. If you and your doctor decide that it is time for you to stop taking medicine, you should stop slowly over a few weeks. Stopping all at once can cause side effects. When you are stopping your medicine, tell your doctor if any of the symptoms of depression come back. Your doctor can start the medicine again before you have a full relapse.
Medicine and therapy can make you feel better. This list shows you some other things you can do to feel better.

- **Take care of your health.** When you are depressed, you are more likely to get physically sick, like getting a cold or the flu. This can make you more depressed.

- **Get enough sleep.** Sleep during regular hours. Try to go to sleep and wake up around the same time each day.

- **Eat a well-balanced diet.** You might not feel like eating. If you do not eat, you will feel worse. Eat breakfast, lunch, and dinner at the same time every day.

- **Exercise daily.** Exercise helps you think about something besides depressing thoughts. Ask your doctor what kind of exercise is best for you. Some ideas include walking, jogging, aerobics, weight training, or a sport.

- **Be around others.** When you are feeling bad, talking with other people can be hard. However, getting outside and being around other people may help you feel better.

- **Work at your friendships.** Friendships may help you feel better and supported. It is important to have someone to talk with. Talk to friends and family.

- **Know your limits.** When you are feeling bad, it may make you feel worse being around people. It is okay not to socialize much until you feel better. Tell your family and friends how you feel. Tell them you need some time for yourself now.

- **Let close friends and family know what you are going through.** Let people you trust know you are depressed. They can help you feel better. Ask your family and friends to put less stress on you for a while.

- **Take up a hobby.** Fun activities help to take your mind off depressing thoughts. Some ideas include gardening, crafting, dancing, music, or art.

**RESOURCES**

- National Institute of Mental Health 1.866.615.6464 / 1.866.415.8051 www.nimh.gov/health/topics/index.shtml
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill www.nami.org
Feeling better takes time. Expect your mood to improve gradually, not immediately. People rarely “snap out of” a depression, but they can feel a little better each day. Do not get discouraged if you do not see changes after a few months of treatment. Talk with your doctor or therapist about how you feel and changes you want to see. Your doctor or therapist will help find a treatment. Most therapists know how to work in different ways to treat depression.

As you begin to feel better, think about what could have led to your depression. Think about what you can change in your life to avoid becoming depressed. If you are not sure where to go for help, call Community Care. In times of crisis, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

Here are some things you can do to help yourself feel better:

• **Keep a daily schedule.**

• **Set goals.** Break large tasks into small ones and do what you can as you can. Reward yourself for each goal you reach.

• **Think positive thoughts.** If you have negative thoughts about yourself, try to change them. Do not blame yourself. Don’t expect to fail.

• **Fight your negative thoughts.** If you find yourself thinking something negative, try to look at it another way. Depression often makes you think the worst. Step back from the problem or write the problem down.

• **Notice good things about yourself.** Keep a list and carry it with you. Seeing good things helps you put your negative thoughts in perspective.
• **Ask for help with big decisions when you feel depressed.** Depression changes how you think about yourself and feel about situations. You might not make clear decisions. When making a big decision, ask someone you trust to help you.

• **Ask for help when you need it.** You might think that no one wants to hear about your problems, but there are people who want to help.

• **Do not criticize yourself when things go wrong.** Everything does not always go as you hope. Making positive changes in your life takes time. Be patient. Be sure to notice improvements.

• **Think about taking stress management or assertiveness classes.** These classes teach ways to deal with stress and how to express yourself when you have a problem.

• **Think about joining a self-help group.** Join a group for people who have had depression. It will help to talk to people who have had the same problems as you.

• **Get help for problems that make treatment harder.** Talk to your doctor or therapist about your alcohol or drug use. Using alcohol or drugs can make depression worse.

• **Participate in activities that make you feel better.** Mild exercise, going to a movie or a ballgame, or participating in other activities may help.

• **Do not drink alcohol or use street drugs while taking antidepressants.** Tell your doctor if you use alcohol or street drugs.

**TIPS**
To help to improve your mood, you can:

• Listen to music
• Spend time with pets
• Talk with other people
• Visit family and friends
• Learn a new skill
• Share jokes
• Volunteer to help others
• Work with a support group
• Go to a local senior center
• Eat healthy and exercise
Depression is not a normal part of getting older. Older adults go through changes that can lead to times of feeling sad. Feeling sad can be normal. But sadness that lasts a long time is not normal. Sadness that makes it hard to do things each day is not normal. It is not normal to think of suicide.

There are many reasons for older adults to feel sad, including:

- Losing loved ones and friends
- Using drugs or alcohol
- Retirement
- Moving
- Medical illness
- Having few friends
- Fear of death
- Chronic or severe pain
- Not spending time with other people
- Past depression
- Feeling alone
- Difficulty getting around due to illness
- Losing the ability to do things, such as driving
- Some medicines for health problems

Older people who are depressed have a higher chance of dying from a worsening medical illness or suicide. Older people who are depressed are more disabled than people who are not depressed. They also tend to recover poorly from medical illnesses such as stroke or hip fracture.

Depression is common in older adults and can lead to being disabled. Depression can be treated. People who get over depression are healthier. They have a better social life as well.

Most people who are depressed get better when they are treated. Being depressed can hurt. It can make you feel sick. It can make you sad. It can change the way you think about yourself and others. It can keep you from doing things that you need to do to stay alive. It can keep you from doing things you like. It can even threaten your life. If you are depressed, you may feel worried or be afraid. Depression needs to be treated.
Myths and Facts About Depression

Myth
“The last thing I need is another pill.”

Fact
People who are depressed may be sicker because of their depression. If they treat their depression, they may take fewer pills because they are better. Many medicines for depression can be taken just once a day.

Myth
“I can pull myself out of it.”

Fact
We can get out of low moods or being sad by ourselves. But true depression needs professional help.

Myth
“I am too old to change.”

Fact
Depression can be treated no matter your age.

Myth
“Only crazy people see a psychiatrist or therapist.”

Fact
Most of the older people who get mental health care are depressed. Many people see a doctor or therapist and they are not considered “crazy.”

Myth
“Of course I am depressed. You would be too if you were sick (or disabled).”

Fact
Older people who are sick are more likely to be depressed. This does not mean that it is normal. For people who are sick, depression can be treated.

LATE-LIFE DEPRESSION RESOURCES

- Late Life Depression by Patrick Mathiasen, MD and Susan Levert, 1997. Published by Bantam Books.
- Live Longer Depression Free by Mark Miller, MD, and Charles Reynolds III, MD, 2002. Published by the Johns Hopkins University Press
- National Alliance for the Mentally Ill 1.866.950.6864  |  www.nami.org
- National Institute of Mental Health 1.866.615.6464  |  www.nimh.gov
Sometimes a mental health condition, like depression, can occur with a number of other problems. For example, it is common for someone with depression to struggle with physical health issues or problems with drugs or alcohol. There are a few questions that can help identify risky drinking. Please ask yourself the following questions:

1. Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking? □ Yes □ No
2. Have people annoyed you by criticizing you drinking? □ Yes □ No
3. Have you ever felt bad or guilty about your drinking? □ Yes □ No
4. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover? □ Yes □ No

If you answered yes to two or more of these questions or if you have concerns about your drinking, you can share the answers to these questions with your PCP (doctor) or behavioral health practitioner. You can also call Community Care and ask to speak with a care manager if you would like to discuss this further.