

MAJOR DEPRESSIVE DISORDER: TREATMENT PLAN

General Information

Depression is a common medical illness that affects one in five people at some point in their lifetime.

Common symptoms associated with depression include:

- Sadness; depressed mood
- Hopelessness
- Loss of pleasure in most activities
- Low energy; fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Appetite disturbances
- Poor concentration and diminished ability to manage daily tasks

In more serious cases, depression can be associated with:

- Suicidal thoughts or urges
- Self-injury
- Inability to manage the activities of daily living
- Unusual thoughts

Depression can result in significant impairment in areas such as:

- Work productivity
- Academic performance
- Relationship skills
- Problem solving skills

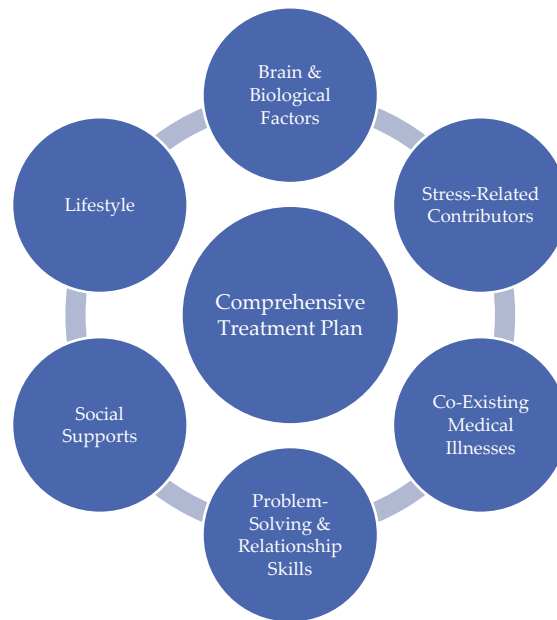
Depression is often associated with other disorders. When these illnesses co-exist, outcomes can be negatively impacted unless both or all disorders are diagnosed and treated. Common co-existing illnesses include:

- Anxiety Disorders
- Substance Use Disorders
- Diabetes
- Cardiovascular Diseases
- Parkinson's Disease
- Autoimmune Disorders
- Chronic Pain

Treatment of Depression

Depression is a medical illness that affects brain and body. The illness of depression can have negative health consequences if not properly treated. It is important for patients to get all or almost all depressive symptoms under control as quickly as possible. Achieving only partial improvement is associated with a higher incident of relapse, poorer quality of life, and adverse health outcomes.

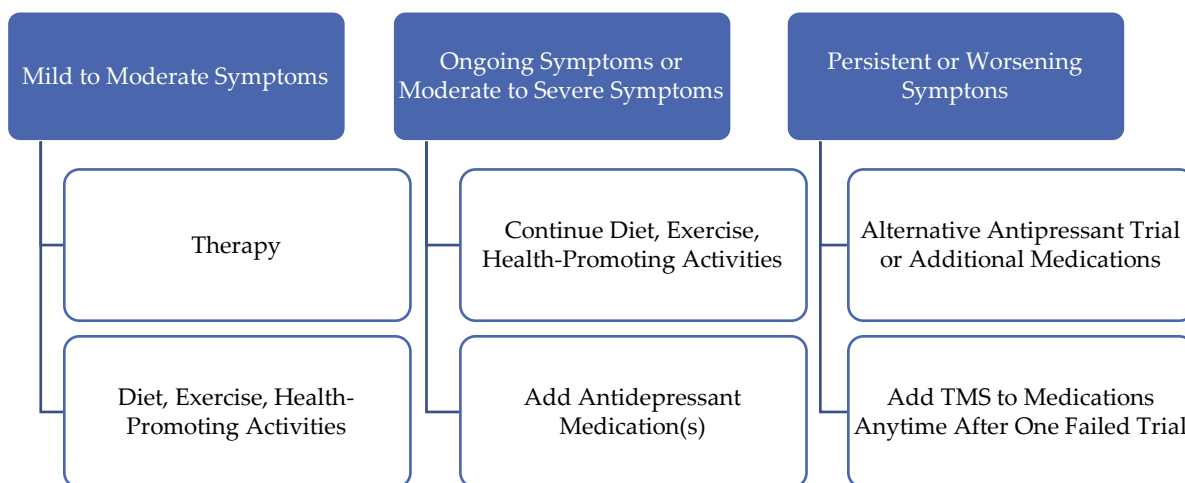
Most patients will need a comprehensive treatment plan to achieve remission (the resolution of all or most symptoms) of their depressive episode. It is important to address all the causes that can contribute to depression including the brain and biological factors, stress-related contributors, co-existing medical illnesses, problem-solving and relationship skills, social supports, and lifestyle (including diet and exercise).



SMART centers strongly promote the implementation and active monitoring of a comprehensive care plan, as we believe this will give you the best chance to achieve the maximum benefit. This means that for you to get the best results, you may need to combine therapy and medications, and in drug-resistant cases, include TMS therapy. For many patients, depression is a recurring, or at times, chronic condition. You may need a plan of ongoing treatment to maintain improvement and prevent recurrence. TMS therapy booster treatments or additional courses of therapy are options for patients who have seen improvement from these treatments in the past. The following material provides a better picture of the interventions and suggestions will likely be a part of your care plan.

What to Expect: Your Treatment Experience

At SMART centers, your provider will rely on current medical evidence when establishing a treatment plan for you. Depending on your history (number of previous episodes and medication trials) and your symptoms and testing results, you and your provider will discuss all the options available that will best support your recovery. Below is a general guide to the care plan, as well as additional details about each intervention.



For a small percentage of patients, the options above may not provide adequate relief. When this occurs, other treatment options are available including hospital care and Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT). ECT can be a powerful treatment option for very severely depressed patients and is administered in a medical setting under general anesthesia.

Assessment

Depression is a brain disease that unfortunately does not currently have any standard biologic tests, such as blood testing or imaging of the involved organ, that are commonly used in other diseases, to diagnose the presence of the illness, or measure the health effects it is having on an individual. Because of this, SMART Health & Wellness Centers have developed a comprehensive approach to better evaluate our patients. Using a combination of comprehensive psychiatric exams and any of a number of screenings – measurement-based testing, lab results looking for possible inflammatory conditions or chemical influences, genetic testing, and overall general health status monitoring – our providers can develop a course of treatment and create a personalized plan just for you. Developing the right treatment plan for you starts with a better understanding of your symptoms and arriving at the accurate diagnosis. This process starts with your psychiatric interview which helps your provider learn about you, including the course of your illness, the symptoms you experience, the stresses in your life, your past medical and psychiatric history, your current life situation, and your concerns and questions.

Innovative Testing

CNS Vital Signs Testing: A computerized neurocognitive testing platform that assesses how well your brain is managing tasks, such as working memory, verbal memory, concentration, processing speed, and executive functioning. These results give your provider objective measurements and can identify levels of impairment, or may track improvement in function. This test can also be helpful in monitoring your progress during treatment.

qEEG: Quantitative electroencephalogram (qEEG) measures the electrical activity in the brain using surface electrodes. Data is collected and analyzed by a computer program and compared to databases that have established norms. The computer produces a colorized map demonstrating brain areas with low or excessive activity compared to these norms. This gives your provider objective information about which area(s) in the brain may be affected by, or may be generating, the dysfunction. This information may help explain your symptoms. While qEEG is not diagnostic by itself, by using this objective data and analyzing it within the clinical context of your symptoms, your provider may gain a better understanding of the location within your brain that may be causing your symptoms. This data may be helpful to your provider in making decisions about additional testing or TMS therapy prescriptions. It may even suggest ruling out other co-existing psychiatric disorders.

Genetic Testing: If you have failed to achieve remission after three antidepressant trials, or you have been intolerant of previous medications, your provider will recommend genetic testing to identify those medications which you should avoid because your body has shown it cannot properly metabolize the drug.

Standard Testing

Physical & Lab Work: If you have not had a physical exam or lab work within the last year, you will be encouraged to do both. Many physical illnesses masquerade as depression or worsen existing depression and must be addressed. Thyroid disease, diabetes, neurological diseases, rheumatoid arthritis, and Lupus are just a few. Additionally, your provider will want to capture a general health “baseline” in order to appropriately monitor the impact of any prescribed medications on your overall health.

Treatment Options

Below is a general overview of treatment options. You may have already tried some of these interventions or this may be your first experience with treatment. Your provider will work with you to determine which treatment is best for you at this time. Many individuals will progress through several options or may need a combination of interventions to achieve the best result. It will be important for you to communicate with your provider as you go through a comprehensive treatment plan.

Exercise

- Several scientific studies have demonstrated the value of exercise in alleviating depressive symptoms.
- Exercise has been shown to be valuable in preventing the development of depression.
- A large U.S. study showed that those who exercise had fewer days of poor mental health in the last month when compared to those who do not exercise.
- U.S. Department of Health Guidelines for Physical activity call for adults to have 150-300 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity weekly or 75 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise weekly. Older adults should have a multicomponent schedule of physical activity to include balance training and muscle-strength building activities.
- If you are not sure about your physical health and ability to exercise, consult your PCP or schedule an appointment with us for a physical assessment.



Therapy



- Several types of therapy have evidenced-based support of their usefulness in alleviating depressive symptoms: mindfulness-based therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Interpersonal Therapy.
- SMART centers offer Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) classes. These classes teach the fundamental CBT skills that address the common cognitive distortions that characterize depression. The classes teach skills to analyze and reframe thoughts, thereby relieving negative mood symptoms. Additionally, the classes address problem-solving strategies and stress management skills.

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- For those with mild depression, CBT alone may be adequate to resolve their symptoms. For those with moderate or severe depression, CBT should be used in combination with medications or TMS therapy. For those suffering from treatment-resistant depression, CBT should be considered a necessary part of your treatment plan.
- There are several good commercially-available books and recordings that teach mindfulness strategies. These tools can be very helpful in managing stress.

Medications

- *Antidepressant Medications:* Common options include SSRI, SNRI, or dual-action medications. Common side effects may include sexual dysfunction, headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, appetite changes, and weight gain (with some medications).
- *Augmentation Medications:* These include combination antidepressants, atypical antipsychotics, lithium, or thyroid replacement. Side effects may include tremor, fatigue, appetite changes, weight gain, and drowsiness. Long-term side effects may differ by medication choice. Lithium may contribute to thyroid dysfunction or impairment of the kidney's ability to concentrate urine. Atypical antipsychotic agents carry a small risk of irreversible neurologic movement disorders with long-term use.
- *Consistency:* Continuing use of medications will likely be recommended as a strategy to maintain response or prevent recurrent episodes in patients with a history of recurrent depressive episodes.
- *Alternatives:* While antidepressant medications help many patients, not all patients respond or achieve remission with medications alone. The chances of achieving remission begin to drop with subsequent trials, and data suggests that by the third drug failure the chances of achieving remission fall significantly. Therefore, SMART centers' policy is to present you with education about alternative treatments if you have not achieved adequate improvement after two drug trials.



Diet



- The consumption of a Mediterranean diet has been associated with a decrease in depressive symptoms. This diet emphasizes the intake of fish, plants and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and legumes, and decreased consumption of red meat, processed foods and sweets.
- The MIND diet is a combination of the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) and a Mediterranean diet. In addition to the above, it emphasizes brain-healthy foods like berries, leafy vegetables, and olive oil.
- Maintenance of a healthy weight is critical to overall health and wellness. We encourage you to work with your provider to achieve a healthier diet.

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)

- TMS therapy is a form of neuromodulation therapy. The brain is organized into groups of neurons that work together to complete specific tasks or control specific functions. These are called networks. When the connectivity within a network is disrupted, the network cannot effectively complete its assigned task. TMS therapy can be used to strengthen these network connections to improve function.
- Studies have shown that TMS therapy begins to outperform antidepressant medication after two failed trials. The best evidence to-date comes from the STAR*D study and suggests that at the third antidepressant medication trial your chance of remission is 16.2%, and by the fourth medication trial the number drops to 6.9%.
 - For patients who cannot tolerate the side-effects of medications, TMS therapy can offer another treatment option.
 - TMS therapy is safe and is delivered in an outpatient setting. The most common side effects are scalp discomfort and occasional nausea or headache. You can transport yourself to and from treatment. The treatment is delivered five days a week, and for most patients, can be completed in half-hour sessions.
 - Most insurance carriers cover TMS therapy but may vary in the requirements needed for approval. SMART centers have Patient Advocates in-office to assist you with education about TMS therapy and to help navigate through insurance coverage requirements.
 - Your provider will provide information about TMS therapy if you have had at least two previous trials of antidepressant therapy and are still experiencing depressive symptoms.



Better Outcomes

Substances to Avoid

- Do not smoke to relieve nervousness. Nicotine and the withdrawal from nicotine worsen anxiety. Ceasing the use of tobacco can reduce depressive symptoms in some individuals.
- Do not use alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant and can cause or worsen depression in some individuals.
- Do not use drugs. Drugs such as cocaine can severely deplete your neurotransmitters, leaving you to spiral farther into depression. Marijuana has been associated with increased incidence of depression in young adults and adolescents. Additionally, marijuana has not been studied with other medications, so your provider cannot know how the use of marijuana will affect the metabolism and effectiveness of your medications.

Other Things to Avoid

- Do not isolate. Social connectedness has been linked to better health outcomes. Engage your support system or build new connections if needed.
- Do not harm yourself. While thoughts of self-harm can accompany depression, these thoughts are not rational and are a part of the illness. Let your provider know if you are struggling with these thoughts. Work with your provider to create a safety plan. Go immediately to the nearest emergency room if you feel unsafe.
- Do not fail to inform your provider about important life events and changes, and don't underreport your symptoms. Let your provider know if you have missed your medications for some reason.

Educate Yourself

- Become educated about the disease of depression and about all the treatment options available to you. An educated and informed patient is more likely to follow the recommendations and engage in activities that foster better health.
- Work with your provider to reach a goal of remission by completing clinical scales at every visit, becoming informed about treatment options, take any prescription medications ordered by your provider and take every dose every day. Medication that sits in your cabinet cannot help you! Inform your provider about side effects that make you feel bad or make you want to quit your medication. Keep your follow-up appointments. Your provider must monitor your progress and adjust treatment if your symptoms are not improving.

- Let your provider know if you feel unsafe and seek emergency treatment if you cannot remain safe.
- Be a partner and invest in your care. Your provider needs you to work with them to help you reach your goals.
- If you are a parent with a child or teen who has depression, you will need to be involved in their care. This includes attending appointments, reporting on symptoms and progress, and monitoring safety and behavioral activities that could negatively impact your child. Your provider may recommend family therapy as this may be an essential part of managing your child's treatment.
- Most importantly, remain hopeful. Most patients who have struggled with depression will need a combination of treatments to achieve the best results. Your provider will work with you to explore additional treatment options. We are glad that you are here. Our SMART clinical team is here to work with you to achieve improved health and wellness.

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Smart Health & Wellness Centers serves patients in our communities utilizing a collaborative, team approach to provide personalized health and wellness through comprehensive assessment and patient education to enable earlier disease intervention.

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