



Dealing with Depression

Introduction

Depression can affect anyone, regardless of their age, gender, economic status, cultural background or general health. It is fairly common for people with kidney disease, whether they're on dialysis or not, to experience depression. It can affect their family members, caregivers and support providers. A person who is depressed has no need to feel ashamed, embarrassed or weak. The important thing to remember is that **depression can be effectively treated**. This Fact Sheet will help you learn more about how to manage depression and to get treatment.

What is depression?

Depression is a state of mind where the things that used to make you happy don't work anymore. It is common to experience some depression after some of life's most difficult events, such as death, divorce—or learning you have kidney failure. Experts say that one out of every three or four people on dialysis can experience depression.

Depression is not just a rare day of sadness. Feeling hopeless and helpless for a few weeks or longer could be a sign. Sleeping or eating more or less than usual—or missing dialysis or other important appointments—can also be clues. Crying a lot, having little energy, feeling worthless, weight changes, and not wanting to live are other signs of depression. Because it is so common and depression can have a very negative effect on quality of life, it's a good idea to speak to someone on your healthcare team if these feelings continue for some time.

Why is knowing about depression important to me?

Depression can take the joy out of life. It can steal your energy and make you feel like there is no hope, or no reason to go on living. If you are depressed, getting dressed and out of the house can feel like climbing a mountain. Feeling this way can also make your health get worse.

It can be hard to believe that life can get better again—**but it can**. Learning more about depression, and getting help will make you feel better.

What can I do if I feel sad or afraid?

When you learn that your kidneys no longer work or that a loved one has kidney disease, it is normal to feel afraid, confused, sad, and sometimes angry. One of the most helpful things you can do about these feelings is to talk about them. Feelings are real and need to be shared. You may have been taught that it is “weak” to talk about personal problems or even cry, but sometimes that is exactly what you need to do. It is not helpful to hold stress, anxiety, sadness and fear inside because doing so can lead to more health problems.

There are many people you can talk to. Your doctor or nurse can answer medical questions, and a social worker can provide support, as well as information about other resources available to help you. Talking to family members and other patients can be a good source of support and inspiration. Many hospitals and all branches of The Kidney Foundation of Canada offer peer

support programs where you can get in touch with others who can share their experiences. The Kidney Foundation's patient manual, *Living with Kidney Disease (Chapter 6)*, provides more information on depression, as well as tips for families and friends.

I have so many questions!

You have a lot of new things to learn and many changes to fit into your life. Write down your questions and concerns so you can get them answered and reduce your worrying. It is common to have ups and downs as you adjust to how kidney disease affects you and those you care about.

After you get used to your new life changes and get answers to your questions, you will likely start to feel better. At first, it may be hard for you (and those around you) to get used to learning a new eating plan, attending additional medical appointments and following your dialysis schedule. However, after awhile these activities should start to feel like a regular part of everyday life.

What can I do if I am feeling depressed?

Try the suggestions listed below every day for a few weeks. They have helped many people feel better. If they do not help you at all, or if you feel like you want to give up, ask your healthcare team for help right away. Depression can be effectively treated and there are many ways to help you feel better.

Some people find it helpful to talk to someone with kidney disease, join a support group, or to get more information about their health issues. Some people benefit from counselling and/or medications to help them through this difficult time. You may also have ideas on what may help you, so talk to others about your needs. Whether you are a person living with kidney disease, or you are supporting someone who is, there are services available to help you manage and cope better.

Some ideas to manage depression

Challenge	What can I do?
I just want to pull the covers over my head and sleep all day.	<p>Become aware of how you are feeling and thinking.</p> <p>Make a plan for the day.</p> <p>Try to keep busy with your daily activities and take rest breaks when you are tired.</p> <p>Do things you enjoy in your life.</p>
<p>I have no energy.</p> <p>I'm restless and feel out of sorts.</p>	<p>Start exercising, even a little.</p> <p>Spend at least 15 minutes every day outside in the fresh air, go for outings or walks if you can, or even just sitting outside can be refreshing.</p> <p>Decide which activities are really important to do and give yourself plenty of time to do them.</p> <p>Find out from your healthcare team if your blood tests, medications and eating plan are okay, or if you need to make changes.</p>

Challenge	What can I do?
I feel that life is very hard for me.	<p>Think about what is making life hard for you.</p> <p>You could write down these thoughts and ideas.</p> <p>Think about what steps you could take to make things better.</p> <p>Ask for help from others.</p> <p>Have a positive attitude.</p> <p>Try to focus on what you are able to do instead of what you cannot do.</p>
I can't go on like this.	<p>Reach out to your family and friends for support.</p> <p>Talk to your social worker or religious counsellor.</p> <p>Seek professional help—ask for a referral to a counsellor or psychiatrist.</p> <p>Ask your doctor about depression medications that can be used by people with kidney failure.</p> <p>Have patience – You may need to try several different medications and strategies to find what works best for you.</p>
If things do not improve	
<p>Speak to a member of your healthcare team to learn more about the help and services that may be available to you.</p> <p>Some questions you may want to ask include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How can you help me if I am feeling sad or depressed? ■ What type of treatment is available? ■ What has helped others? ■ What should I do if I don't feel like living? ■ What if I need help when no one else is around? ■ How can I get help for my loved ones? 	

For further information, or if you wish to help us in our efforts, please contact The Kidney Foundation of Canada office in your area. You can also visit our Web site at www.kidney.ca.

With acknowledgement to Amgen Canada Inc. for permission to adapt this content, and to CANSW and Sarb Basra, Renal Social Worker, Kidney Care Centre, Surrey BC, for their assistance in compiling and reviewing this information.



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