



DEALING WITH DEPRESSION

Depression can affect anyone

Depression can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, economic status, cultural background or general health. It's fairly common for people with kidney disease to experience depression at some point, whether they're on dialysis or not. It can also affect your family members, caregivers and support providers.

Depression takes the joy out of life. It can steal your energy and make you feel like there is no hope, and no reason to go on living. When you're depressed, just getting dressed and leaving the house can feel like climbing a mountain. Feeling this way can also make your health worse.

About 20% of people with CKD have depression. People with kidney disease are 3 to 4 times more likely to have depression than someone from the general population and 2 to 3 times higher than people with another chronic illness. If you're depressed, there's no need to feel weak, ashamed, or embarrassed. It may be hard to believe that life can get better again, but it can. **Depression is a medical illness that can be treated.**

What are the symptoms of depression?

Depression is more than just sadness. It's normal to feel down or upset when you're going through some of life's most difficult changes, including the death of a loved one, a divorce, or even learning that you have a serious health problem like kidney failure. Depression is different in that the intense sadness and hopelessness continues for two weeks or more.

Other symptoms can include:

- Feelings of worthlessness and/or guilt
- Loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed

- Frequent crying
- Very low energy
- Changes in appetite
- Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping more than usual
- Missing dialysis or other important appointment
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Not wanting to go on living

Because depression is so common, and because it can have a very negative effect on your quality of life, it's important to speak to someone on your healthcare team if these feelings continue.

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's 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 they need to be shared. You may have been taught that crying or talking about personal problems is a sign of weakness, but sometimes that's the most helpful thing you can do. It's not healthy to hold stress, anxiety, sadness, and fear inside. It can lead to more health problems.

There are many people you can talk to. Your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist can answer medical questions, and a social worker can provide support and information about other resources available to 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. Chapter 8 of The Kidney Foundation's patient manual, Book 2, [Living with Kidney Failure](#), provides more information on depression, as well as tips for families and friends.

Managing Depression

Now that you're on dialysis, you have a lot of new things to learn and many changes to fit into your life. Once you get used to the changes and get your health and treatment questions answered, your depression will probably improve. At first, it may be hard for you and for those around you to get used to learning a new eating plan, attending extra medical appointments and following your dialysis schedule. After a while, though, these activities should start to feel like a regular part of everyday life.

Write down your questions and concerns so you can get them answered, which can reduce your fear and worry. It's normal to have ups and downs as you adjust to how kidney disease affects you and the people you care about.

If you're feeling depressed, try the suggestions listed below every day for a few weeks. They've helped a lot of people feel better. If they don't 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. Whether you're living with kidney disease or you're supporting someone who is, there are services available to help you manage and cope better.

- Make a plan for the day. Decide which activities are really important to do and give yourself plenty of time to do them.
- Try to keep busy with your daily activities and take rest breaks when you're tired.
- Set aside time for leisure activities you enjoy.
- Spend at least 15 minutes every day outside in the fresh air.
- Get some exercise, even if that means just a short walk. Studies have shown that exercise is very helpful for people with depression.
- Try to be aware of how you're feeling and thinking. Consider tracking your mood, which can show you which activities help you feel better.
- Think about the things that are making life hard for you. Write down your thoughts and ideas. Are there changes you could make that would make your life easier?
- Try to maintain a positive attitude. Focus on what you can do instead of what you can't do.
- Reach out to your family and friends for support.
- Talk to your social worker or religious counsellor.
- Find out from your healthcare team if your blood tests, medications and eating plan are okay, or if you need to make changes.
- Seek professional help. Ask for a referral to a counsellor or psychiatrist.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about other treatment strategies for depression that can be used by people with kidney failure. This may include medications.

Throughout this process, it's important to be patient. You may need to try several different medications or strategies to find the ones that work best for you. If you have some ideas on things that may help that are not on the list above, talk to someone about your needs.

Questions for your healthcare team

Some questions about depression that you may want to ask include:

- How can you help me if I'm feeling sad or depressed?
- What type of treatment is available?
- What's been helpful to 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?

The Kidney Foundation would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the Kidney Foundation's National Programs & Public Policy committee for their contributions and professional expertise in the development of this resource.