

JUST FEELING SAD – OR DEPRESSED?



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DEAR PATIENT,

Everyone is familiar with periods of sadness and feeling down. They are a normal part of life just like periods of true happiness. However, it is not always easy to recognise when these feelings turn into the illness “depression”.

▶ SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

Certain signs are an indication of a depressive disorder and not just fleeting feelings of the “blues”.

The three main signs are:

- a sad, low, depressive mood
- loss of interest and joie de vivre
- lack of drive and tiring easily

If you have two of these three signs for more than two weeks, this could point to depression.

They may be coupled with other symptoms:

- reduced concentration and attentiveness
- reduced feeling of self-worth and self-esteem
- feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- exaggerated fears for the future and a negative outlook
- sleep disorders
- thoughts of death or suicide

There may also be physical symptoms that point to depression, for instance loss of appetite, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches or other pains like back ache, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, breathlessness or even a feeling of pressure in the neck and chest.

Depression is a clinical picture with many different faces. Even if you notice signs of a depressive disorder, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are suffering from depression.

▶ THE TWO-QUESTION TEST

A simple test can confirm the suspicion of a depressive disorder: the so-called “Two-Question Test”.

- Over the past month have you often felt down, sad, depressed or desperate?
- Over the past month did you take far less pleasure and joy in things that you normally enjoy doing?

If the answer to both questions is “yes”, you should go and see a doctor or a psychotherapist.

▶ EXAMINATION

Once you have decided to visit a doctor or psychotherapist, they will undertake a comprehensive examination. He may ask you to complete questionnaires.

This diagnostic consultation is the most important tool in order to determine whether you are suffering from depression and, if so, how severe it is.

The more open and precise you can be when answering the questions, the easier it will be for your doctor or psychotherapist to decide. This is important because the treatment is oriented towards how ill you may be.

▶ TREATMENT

In many cases there is excellent treatment for depression.

Treatment may involve medication – so-called antidepressants – psychotherapeutic measures or other options, for example sport.

The treatment that is right for you depends on your personal wishes and ideas, as well as to your case history.

More details about the individual treatment options can be found in the Patient Guideline (see box overleaf).

▶ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- The most important step is going to see a doctor or psychotherapist. You are perhaps ashamed of not being able to cope with your depressed mood on your own.
A mental disorder, like depression, just like a physical disorder, is not a question of guilt. No-one would be ashamed of going to see a doctor because they had a sore back.
- Sometimes it may be helpful to take a family member or friend, who knows you well and whom you trust, along with you the first time you go to see a doctor or psychotherapist. He can support you and perhaps describe some changes in your mood or drive from “the outsider perspective”.
- In seeking help, you have already taken the first big step. You need to accept that this treatment takes time. Patients already experience a noticeable improvement after two to three weeks. It may, however, take up to six months for your depressive episode to disappear.
- You yourself can contribute to your treatment. Sport and physical activity are very important. You don't have to go in for anything strenuous or push yourself unnecessarily.
Try to set yourself achievable goals: a walk in the fresh air, a short bicycle ride. You choose what you like doing.
- Other little things can help, too. Phoning a friend, meeting up with someone, a hairdresser's appointment or a homemade meal can all be little successes.
- With support crises are easier to overcome. Accept offers to chat and assistance from your partner, friends or family members.
- It may help you to engage in an exchange with other people who have depression. They may have similar experiences and understand only too well how you are feeling right now. You could join a self-help group. You will always be welcome there. The members chat, encourage one-another and swap concrete coping tips. Talking helps!

▶ MORE INFORMATION

This Patient Information is based on the latest scientific findings and sums up the most important points from the Patient Guideline “Unipolar Depression”.

Other useful links

Patient Guideline “Unipolar Depression”:

www.patienten-information.de/patientenleitlinien

Self-help organizations and cooperation partners involved in the Patient Guideline:

www.patienten-information.de/patientenbeteiligung/selbsthilfe, www.azq.de/pf

Information leaflet „Depression – guide for family members“: www.patinfo.org

Contact to self-help groups

You can find out from NAKOS (national contact and information office for the encouragement and support of self-help groups) where there is a self-help group in your area: www.nakos.de, Tel.: 030 3101 8960

Patient Guidelines

Patient Guidelines translate the treatment recommendations in medical guidelines into everyday language that can be understood by ordinary people. They provide important background information on the causes, examination methods and treatment of a disease. The BÄK (German Medical Association), the KBV (National Associations of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians) and the AWMF (Association of Scientific Medical Societies working group) are the co-ordinators of the programme for the development of medical guidelines (“National Medical Guidelines”) and the respective patient versions.

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