



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What you need to know about
Depression.

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+ Depression is the most common psychological disorder in Qatar for the last 10 years

+ WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is a mood disorder that causes persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest in most things over a long period, usually for two or more weeks or even months. These features are usually accompanied by other symptoms such as changes in sleep or appetite. Depression interferes with your daily activities and eventually leads to difficulty in coping with everyday life.

We can all feel miserable or sad at times. These feelings do not usually last longer than 1-2 weeks and are not accompanied by other symptoms. These feelings do not interfere with our daily activities. Sadness as a feeling is not the same as depression.

Depressed people may even feel suicidal or want to harm themselves.

Women are twice likely to suffer depression as men.

Depression can affect people differently and is associated with a wide range of symptoms including:

- Persistent sadness.
- Marked loss of interest in life or pleasurable activities.
- Sleep problems.
- Poor appetite and weight loss.
- Fatigue or loss of energy.
- Agitation or slow movements.
- Poor concentration.
- Feelings of worthlessness, or excessive guilt.
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.

Most people with depression do not have all these symptoms, but

+ WHAT CAUSES DEPRESSION?

Several factors can increase a person's risk of developing depression. These may be due to either recent or past experiences or changes in body-chemistry. They include:

- **Stressful life events** such as bereavement and divorce.
- **Traumatic events** such as car accidents and rape.
- **Major life changes** such as unemployment, retirement, and financial difficulties.
- **Family history of depression.**
- **Life-threatening or long-standing physical illnesses** such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and arthritis.
- **Pregnancy and postnatal period.**
- **Adverse childhood events** such as child abuse and family violence.
- **Certain prescribed medicines**, for examples, steroids and anticancer drugs.

+ WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR?

If you have been experiencing a low mood for two weeks or more, your feelings are getting worse or affects your work, interests, and attitudes towards your family and friends, or if you feel that life is not worth living, go and see your doctor immediately.

+ WHAT WILL YOUR DOCTOR

Your doctor will ask you relevant questions about the above symptoms, their durations and their effects on your daily activities.

Your doctor may order some tests if necessary. If the diagnosis of depression is made, your doctor will discuss the treatment options with you.

In some cases, you may be referred to a specialist for further treatment.



+ SPECIALIST CARE

The specialist will reassess your diagnosis and initial treatment plan and discuss further treatment plans with you.

Depending on your symptoms or the seriousness of the depression, your doctor or the specialist may recommend:

- Changes to your lifestyle, for example adjusting your work/life balance, regular exercise or getting regular sleep.
- Talking treatments also known as **Psychotherapies**.
- Oral medications popularly called **Antidepressant tablets**.
- A combination of two or more of the above options.

If you don't respond fully to an antidepressant tablet, the specialist may change your medication to a different antidepressant or prescribe an antidepressant tablet together with another class of medication.

If your depression is very severe, puts your life at risk and urgent treatment is needed, or if your depression is severe and has not responded to other treatments, then the specialist may prescribe a treatment known as **Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT)** which is fast acting and effective but requires monitoring in the hospital.

Some psychological problems such as **intimate partner violence** can cause depression but occasionally people are reluctant to discuss it. If this relates to your situation, discuss this with your doctor.

+ THERAPIES TO HELP WITH DEPRESSION

There are different types of therapies for treating depression.

- **Psychotherapies.** These are talking treatments that helps to break the cycle of negative thoughts. They include:
 - **Cognitive Behavioural therapy or counselling** are usually the first step of treatment and may last for up to 12-20 sessions. Each session usually lasts 1 hour and, to begin with, are usually held weekly.
 - **Group therapy, family therapy or bereavement counselling** are other effective ways of treating depression. Ask your doctor about the details.

- **Anti-depressant medicines.** These work by balancing the chemicals in the brain that control our moods.

Some people may experience side effects when taking these medicines such as feeling sick, dry mouth, constipation, headaches, and low sex drive. These usually improve within a few weeks.

- **Antipsychotic medicines.** Used mainly for treating depression that has not responded to antidepressants alone or depression which is associated with psychotic symptoms
- **Electroconvulsive therapy.** Used mainly for treating depression that fails to improve with other treatments or severe depression that puts your life at risk and urgent treatment is needed.

+ IMPORTANT TIPS:

- **Do not keep to yourself.** Talk to people you trust about your feelings. This may help you and it will make it easier for you to talk to your doctor.
- **Tell your doctor if you are taking any other prescription or over-the-counter medications** as this may affect your treatment.
- **Eat well.** You may not feel like eating. Try to eat healthy diets including fresh fruits and vegetables.
- **Keep doing things you enjoy.** This will help you keep positive.
- **Exercise regularly.** It releases endorphins into your body, which are natural antidepressants.
- **It may take a few weeks for you to start feeling the beneficial effects of an antidepressant.** Improvement may be gradual after this delay. Be patient and allow enough time.

+ FOLLOW UP

Make sure you visit your doctor as follows:

- After the first 2 week of treatment.
- At intervals of 2-4 weeks in the first 3 months.
- Your doctor may decide to see you more frequently.

It is normal practice to continue antidepressants for several months after a person feels better. This is to reduce the risk of depression returning. Some people with severe or recurrent episodes of depression may benefit from continuing antidepressants on a longer-term basis.

The decision to stop taking antidepressants should be taken jointly by you and your doctor. Do not stop medication without discussing it with your doctor. If a decision is made to stop your antidepressants, your doctor may still want to see you. If you start feeling depressed again, after stopping treatment, visit your doctor.

+ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Ministry of Public Health has published a National Clinical Guideline advising doctors on how to treat patients with depression.

The Guideline is available to the public from the MoPH website: www.moph.gov.qa.

