



Beyond the Blues: Coping with Caregiver Depression Handout

Are you a caregiver that is carrying the heavy weight of depression? Caregivers are at least two times more apt to suffer from depression than others. Depression is an illness not a reflection of your strength as a person. Depression is not a sign of being weak. You wouldn't think you were weak because you had any other medical illness. Depression that isn't treated harms your thoughts, feelings and physical health. Don't ignore this serious medical concern!

What are the symptoms of Depressive Illness?

Feeling sad is a normal part of life. How do you determine when you have crossed into a clinical depression? Feeling sad, moody, or frustrated for short periods of time is a normal part of life. Depression is an illness with certain symptoms. The symptoms must occur for **at least a two-week period** of time.

You would have at least one of these two symptoms for at least 2 weeks:

- Depressed mood most of the day nearly every day
- Loss of interest or pleasure in almost all activities

Plus +

Four or more of the following symptoms also present for at least 2 weeks:

- Eating more or less than normal with weight loss or weight gain
- Poor sleep either being unable to fall asleep, stay asleep, or sleeping excessively
- Feeling physically agitated or physically slowed down
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Negative thoughts of being worthless, excessive guilty or worried thoughts
- Difficulty thinking clearly or making decisions, poor concentration and memory
- Reoccurring thoughts of death, or suicidal thoughts or planning

What causes Depressive Illness?

- Biological factors – disruptions in brain chemicals called neurotransmitters
- Genetic factors - if family members struggled with a mood disorder



- Environmental factors - experiencing a trauma, loss of a loved one, or other stressful situations
- Psychological factors or the ways in which you tend to process life events emotionally and mentally
- Certain physical illnesses and medications can contribute

What can you do to treat depressive illness?

Depressive illness will make it very hard to do the very things you need to do in order to get well. You will need to balance being gentle with what you expect of yourself. In order to get well you will also need to push yourself to do things even when you don't feel like it.

- Pay closer attention to your thoughts and feelings
- Speak up, set limits and take care of your needs
- Cut back on unnecessary stresses
- Set up small rituals or daily practices to take a few moments to reflect on yourself
- Take a break from the demands and do something you enjoy
- Treat yourself with kindness and compassion
- Talk with your Primary Doctor and see if Anti-depressant medications might be an option to bring your brain chemistry or neurotransmitters back into balance.
- Reach out for support and connect with others
- Seek the compassionate listening ear of a counselor
- Make sure that you are eating regular meals and trying to incorporate balanced menus that can support your physical health.
- Follow the guidance for good sleep hygiene
- Engage in daily movement or exercise
- Get outside and soak in some sunlight
- Having a daily structure or plan, break down tasks to manageable steps
- Notice interrupt or challenge your negative thoughts, it's your depression talking
- Reach out for help with any thoughts of suicide
- Remember you are ill so treat yourself with some kindness and understanding
- Practice Mindfulness or other meditation practices

Reach out to the VA Caregiver Support Line. Our Licensed Social Workers can assist you in finding a path forward "Beyond the Blues!"