MANAGING DEPRESSION: A 3-STEP APPROACH

Engaging, Starting, Continuing

Succeeding in the treatment journey: patients’ perspectives
This brochure has been developed specifically for people living with depression. It has been co-created by people who have experience of living with depression who are members of Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe (GAMIAN-Europe), a pan-European organization representing and advocating for the interests and rights of people affected by mental ill-health, and by SERVIER.

This brochure contains personal insights from people with first-hand experience of living with depression and can be read in conjunction with previous publications such as: A guide to depression and its treatment and Take care and be kind to yourself available at https://www.gamian.eu/publications/.

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Globally, an estimated 280 million people have depression, that’s around 5% of the world’s adult population.1 As such, depression is one of the most common mental health problems and is a leading cause of disability.1,2 Depression is different from usual fluctuations in mood and emotional responses to everyday life events.2 People living with depression can experience feelings of being intensely sad, and/or hopelessness.3 They can have little or no interest in activities and a decreased ability to feel pleasure.3 Depression can have a substantial impact on everyday life.2,3 In many cases, depression is a chronic condition, and experts recommend that it should be managed as such, ie, with a comprehensive, long-term treatment plan.4

Treatment can involve medications, and/or psychological therapies, which are sometimes called talking therapies.5,6 Clinically recommended treatments for depression are not discussed here. For further information regarding treatments for depression, please refer to our previous brochure A guide to depression and its treatment available at https://www.gamian.eu/publications/

Friends, family, and support groups play a critical role in helping and supporting as you navigate along the treatment pathway. Meeting people with similar experiences is comforting and provides reassurance that you are not alone. Being open and honest is an important step toward getting help and sustaining the motivation to keep going with treatment, even when faced with challenges. Trust in people and the whole process is important; an honest and open dialogue with an understanding health care professional can help you manage symptoms and expectations. Quotes and insights reflect the experiences of people living with depression and do not necessarily reflect medical and scientific evidence or practice. 1. Rush AJ, Thase ME. Improving depression outcome by patient-centered medical management. Am J Psychiatry. 2018;175(12):1187-1198.

THREE KEY STEPS IN TREATING DEPRESSION:

ENGAGING, STARTING, CONTINUING

Someone can, and will help, if I ask for it.

It’s not helpful to wait to have a conversation to improve mental health; having a doctor who I could trust and who understood me was really important.

It was important to be open and honest about my symptoms and not to blame myself for my depression.... I wouldn’t blame myself for having a chronic illness such as heart disease, so why blame myself for having depression?

Support groups that bring together people who are going through or have gone through similar experiences and understand the true impact of depression are priceless. The first time I met people who shared similar experiences changed the way I viewed my condition and allowed me to be more accepting of the way I felt.

Entering into a dialogue with your health care professional is an important part of the treatment process. The importance of honest and open discussions should not be underestimated and allows you to remain active in your treatment.

Just as with treatment for any health condition, for people with depression, engaging in, starting, and continuing treatment can be a complicated process involving a series of often frightening or overwhelming decisions.

The individual first needs to recognize that there is a problem and then decide whether to consult a health care professional.

The health care professional must then be able to diagnose the health problem and may propose a treatment or management plan.

The individual must then decide whether to start treatment and subsequently, whether to continue it.

Engaging in treatment involves help, support, and reassurance from many different people including health care professionals, family, and friends. Some people with depression may not want treatment and experts recognize that several factors may contribute to this, including: a lack of belief in the benefits; concern over the cost; feeling the process is too complicated; and worrying about possible side effects. People can also be reluctant to engage in treatment because of the stigma associated with seeking mental health help.

The treatment journey may involve contact with numerous health care professionals, who may or may not recommend treatment that the person with depression considers helpful. Negative experiences may result in an individual not wanting any further treatments. However, a recent survey from the World Health Organization (WHO) has shown that people who remain engaged and persevere with different types of therapies will find a treatment that they consider helpful.

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Accepting that treatment may be long term and the possibility of living with it for several months is important if you want to see an improvement.

It is known that for many people with depression, there are numerous potential barriers to starting treatment. These barriers can be daunting and include attitudes and beliefs about depression and its care. Once a treatment has been recommended it is important to begin it as early as possible. Research confirms that recognizing depression early and then getting started on treatment is crucial for better long-term outcomes.

For people with depression, making the decision to begin treatment may involve many difficult considerations. Taking the first steps toward treatment requires collaboration, help, and support from health care providers, family, and friends.

A large proportion of people with depression do not take the first step and initiate treatment. Research shows that, overall, more than 30% of people with depression do not start their treatment. A third of those referred fail to attend a first psychotherapy visit and one in four people prescribed a first-time antidepressant either do not take their medication or only continue with it for a short time.

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Feeling better is a good motivator. Learn to enjoy small moments of not being depressed, even if these feelings are fleeting.

Understanding depression and the importance of treatment are central; knowledge is a valuable tool. It can feel very challenging to continue with treatment when expectations are not met, so it is really important to keep seeking help and support.

For any health condition, sticking to a treatment plan is vital for treatment success.1 It has been shown that for people with depression, continuing with treatment is crucial for better outcomes.2 Development and approval of any treatment modality is a complex process which involves scientific studies. To get the most benefit, it is important to continue your treatment as recommended by your health care professional.

Unfortunately, continuing treatment can be challenging. According to research, up to 50% of people with depression do not complete the first 6 months of treatment, among those who do stay in treatment, more than half do not take their treatment as prescribed or scheduled.3 In a separate study, up to 50% of those referred for psychotherapy drop out before a second visit.4

Being able to keep the conversations going with understanding health care professionals, family, and friends, who keep listening and offering support helps people living with depression to have trust in the treatment process. This enables them to better manage their symptoms and expectations so that they are more likely to keep going on their treatment path.

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FURTHER INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Information, knowledge, and support can help you manage daily life with mental health problems. Follow these links to useful websites and resources for further information and support:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Website</th>
<th>URL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GAMIAN-EUROPE website</td>
<td><a href="https://www.gamian.eu">https://www.gamian.eu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Institute of Mental Health</td>
<td><a href="https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression">https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Europe (MHE)</td>
<td><a href="https://www.mhe-sme.org/who-we-are-2/">https://www.mhe-sme.org/who-we-are-2/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind</td>
<td><a href="https://www.mind.org.uk">https://www.mind.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td><a href="https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression">https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression</a></td>
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Do not change or stop your treatment without advice from a health care professional, such as your referring doctor. If your symptoms worsen, please consult a health care professional, such as your referring doctor.

This document has been co-created by GAMIAN-Europe and Servier.

Quotes shared by persons who have experience of living with depression reflect their own experiences and do not necessarily reflect medical and scientific evidence or practice.