

# When Your Loved One Is Depressed

*Tips on How You Can Help*



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## Depression Is Real

Depression is a common and serious medical condition that impacts more than 30 million Americans every year. Depression can affect people regardless of their age, gender, race, socioeconomic status or educational level. Someone being treated for chronic kidney disease (CKD) has a greater risk of suffering from depression than those in the general population. CKD impacts every aspect of a person's life and if attention is not given to the emotional well-being of the patient, it is possible the depression can develop and complicate living with kidney disease.

## What Is Depression?

Depression is a complex disease we are just beginning to understand. It is thought to be caused by underlying chemical imbalances in the brain, severe emotional trauma such as a violent act, constant stress or family history. Often there is no clear reason at all why a person suffers from depression.

Depression is a condition, if left untreated, causes people to feel "empty", worthless, lonely, profound guilt for no reason and hopeless about the future.

Depression makes it difficult for people to concentrate, remember or make decisions. This can make managing kidney disease very difficult.

Depression is a condition that leads your loved ones to isolate or withdraw themselves from the important love and support you have to offer.

Depression can cause otherwise normally functioning people to become preoccupied with thoughts of their own death or in its worst state, lead to a suicide attempt.

## Symptoms of Depression

Depression should not be confused with the feelings of sadness or the "blues" that most of us feel from time to time. Rather, depression is characterized by how long it lasts, the intensity of its symptoms and its often unexplained origin. The following is a list of common symptoms you should be aware of and some







accompanying statements you might hear a depressed person say.

- **Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood**

“No matter how hard I try,

I just don’t feel happy or satisfied.”

- **Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism**

“What’s the point? I will never feel any better and this is all just a waste of time.”

- **Feelings of guilt and worthlessness**

“I have nothing to offer anyone anymore. I’m so useless.”

- **Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable**

“No, I think I will stay home because I don’t really care about playing cards anymore anyway.”

- **A decrease in normal energy levels or feelings of constant fatigue**

“I just can’t get going.” or “I have no

energy to even talk right now.”

- **Trouble concentrating or making decisions**

“I sit here and try to read and I get stuck on the same paragraph over and over.”

- **Unexplained restlessness or irritability**

“I feel so crabby all the time. The littlest things upset me.”

- **Difficulty with sleep, such as an inability to get to sleep, stay asleep or excessive sleep**

“I can get to sleep alright, but I wake up every night around 2:00 and I can’t fall back to sleep.”

- **Changes in appetite evidenced by weight loss or weight gain**

“I look at food and it just turns me off.” or “When I feel this way I think eating will make me happier.”

- **Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, or attempts to commit suicide (If your loved one ever makes a remark about harming himself, take it seriously and contact your doctor immediately.)**

“You know a lot of people would be better off if I were just gone.”

- **Persistent physical symptoms, such as backaches, headaches or stomach problems that do not respond to conventional medical treatment**

“I know the doctor says I am fine, but I just ache all over.”

## **How You Can Help**

Critical to the well-being of the person you care about who is suffering from depression is your support and patience. This doesn’t mean you become a willing participant in the depressed person’s desire to stay in bed all day. You should not let yourself agree with his or her negative and pessimistic thinking. Rather, what you can do is talk with the person who is depressed and encourage that person to seek help for his/her depression. Suggest the person begin by speaking with his/her



doctor or another qualified mental health professional to openly share the feelings he/she is experiencing.

An estimated 80 percent of those suffering from depression who receive treatment in the form of an antidepressant, counseling or a combination of the two, report a significant reduction in their symptoms. Additionally, if your loved one ever talks about harming himself/herself, it is critical you take even the slightest threat of suicide seriously. Contact your doctor or local mental health agency immediately.

You can educate yourself about depression and the ways you can help your loved one by visiting the AAKP Web site at [www.aakp.org](http://www.aakp.org).

Additional resources for depression: Understanding Depression in Kidney Disease  
[www.aakp.org](http://www.aakp.org)

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
[www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org)

The National Institute for Mental Health  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)