



# Depression

## Foreword

In HCV treatment clinical trials, depression was a commonly reported side effect of treatment medications. The range of depression may be from mild to severe. In clinical trials, 1% to 2% patients reported suicidal thoughts or attempts; 2% stopped treatment prematurely because of depression. The purpose of this fact sheet is to help those with HCV understand various aspects of depression in order to discuss them with their healthcare providers. Depression responds to medical treatment and support, especially with early intervention.

According to the National Institutes of Health Consensus statement on HCV infection, successful HCV treatment relies on staying on the prescribed dose of medications for the prescribed period of time. Side effects that disturb quality of life can interfere with this, so it is important to manage side effects early, aggressively, and appropriately.

If you are considering treatment, tell your physician if you have a current or past history of depression or psychiatric illness. It is especially important to report severe depression, hospitalization for any psychiatric illness, or any suicide attempts.

***Important Note: HCV medications may cause or aggravate life-threatening neuropsychiatric disorders.***

## *Deciding Whether or Not to Use Antidepressant Medications*

Sometimes antidepressant medications can be used in conjunction with HCV treatment. Many patients state that antidepressants can make a huge difference in their quality of life while they are undergoing HCV treatment. Depression is not a side effect that is immediately experienced. Often patients do not notice depression until 4 to 12 weeks, or even longer, into treatment. Additionally, it may take antidepressant medications as much as 2 to 8 weeks to become fully effective. It is for these reasons that patients need to decide if they should start antidepressant

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## HCSP FACT SHEET

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HCV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HCV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HCV.

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medication prior to treatment or start HCV treatment and then begin antidepressant medication if they think they need it. Since antidepressant medications can help with other medical complaints, such as fatigue, pain and insomnia, some doctors routinely start patients on antidepressant medications prior to initiating HCV treatment. Talk to your doctor about what would be best for your situation.

*Caution: Those taking HCV or HIV protease inhibitors should avoid St. John’s wort. Potentially significant drug interactions may occur from taking telaprevir (Incivek) and escitalopram (Lexapro) or trazodone (Desyrel); interactions may occur from taking boceprevir (Victrelis) and trazodone, escitalopram or desipramine. Interactions were noted when boceprevir or telaprevir were taken with the anti-anxiety drug alprazolam (Xanax).*

*Nefazodone is rarely used for HCV patients because of the risk of liver failure. Liver enzymes need close monitoring. Duloxetine has a risk of liver toxicity and steatosis, or fatty liver. Bupropion may be associated with an increased risk of interferon-related seizures. Mirtazapine may decrease white blood cell count, which is also a common HCV medication side effect.*

***Symptoms of Depression***

The symptoms of HCV treatment-induced depression are similar to those seen in regular depression. Some symptoms of depression are: feeling sad, “down,” or “blue,” fatigue, irritability, mood swings, feeling apathetic or “empty”, inability to concentrate, change in appetite, and thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Patients with a history of depression may experience interferon-induced depression differently than they had in the past. For instance, a patient who previously felt withdrawn when depressed might experience feelings of anger and irritability during treatment.

***Important Note: If you have thoughts of suicide or hurting yourself or others, seek immediate professional help.***

***Help for Depression***

If you notice any fatigue or mood changes, such as irritability, lack of pleasure, or signs of depression, talk to your doctor. Antidepressant medications are commonly prescribed to treat depression. These medications can dramatically improve the quality of life during treatment. Since it does take time for antidepressant medications to take effect, do not expect immediate results. Typically, antidepressant medications must be taken regularly for two to eight weeks before their full effect is felt, but some people notice improvement sooner.

When it becomes time to stop taking antidepressant medications, patients need slow tapering off while under medical supervision. Some patients wait a month or more after they have completed HCV treatment before they feel they are ready to stop taking antidepressants.

***Important Note: Never stop a medication without talking to your doctor.***

***Side Effects of Antidepressant Medications***

There are many different types of antidepressant medications. Antidepressants can cause side effects that are usually mild. However, some side effects can be serious. Tell your medical provider about any side effects that are unusual, annoying or affect your activities. Common side effects of antidepressants may include: drowsiness, headaches, nausea, feeling agitated or jittery, and sexual problems. Sometimes a drug’s side effects can actually work in a positive way. For instance, if you have insomnia, this may be improved by an antidepressant that is slightly sedating.

All medications can cause allergic reactions. Tell your doctor about any allergies you might have. Antidepressants can also interact with certain drugs or other conditions. Inform your doctor about any over-the-counter or prescription medications, recreational drugs, or dietary supplements you are using, since these

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may affect how the antidepressant works. Finally, notify your doctor if you experience any unusual or worsening symptoms.

### *Self-Help*

The mind and the body are not separate or independent from each other. Your body affects your mind and your mind affects your body. Stress can weaken the immune system and make it harder to resist diseases. Feeling unwell can lead to increased fatigue and more depression. Breaking the cycle of depression may include a mind-body approach. There are ways you can help yourself during this time.

*The following suggestions may enhance your quality of life, but are not intended to replace medical care:*

#### **Support:**

Look for a support group, either for HCV or depression. Ask your family and friends for support. Avoid isolation.

#### **Avoid or reduce stress:**

There are many types of stress management techniques. Yoga, meditation, and stress management classes are a few examples. Some employers, HMOs, and adult education services offer stress management classes.

#### **Exercise:**

Try to be physically active a little bit every day. Even if you do not like to exercise, find a way to move your body. Walking, gardening, and dancing can be enjoyable ways to be active.

#### **Sleep:**

Get at least 8 hours of sleep every night. Talk to your doctor if you have regular insomnia or other sleep problems.

#### **Avoid alcohol and other substances:**

Alcohol, tobacco, excess caffeine and recreational drugs can cause or worsen depression and anxiety. Alcohol is a depressant and is incompatible with HCV. Tobacco and caffeine are stimulants and can cause increased

anxiety. However, caffeine may help combat fatigue and improve mental capabilities.

#### **Eat a healthy diet:**

Try to eat a low fat, high fiber diet. Eat a variety of foods that include fruit, vegetables, and whole grains.

#### **Balance rest and activity:**

Schedule a daily rest period. Pace yourself, take breaks, plan ahead, and delegate.

#### **Practice positive thinking:**

Listen to your internal thoughts. Try to replace negative thoughts with messages of hope and affirmation. Practice positive thinking even if you do not believe it. Over time, positive thinking can become a habit, and can help improve many aspects of your health.

#### **Find ways to laugh and amuse yourself:**

Try to pick at least one pleasurable activity and find the time to do it often. Laughter may not be “the best medicine,” but it sure helps.

Remember that HCV treatment is not forever. It will end and so will the side effects. Be as patient as you can, get support and simplify your life. Regardless of the final treatment outcome, you have the right to feel good about having endured the process. Trying your best is enough to claim a triumph.

#### **For more ideas on ways to manage depression, see the following hcspFACTsheets:**

- Depression: Self-Help Tips
- HCV and Depression
- HCV Treatment and Depression: For Family and Friends
- Medical Treatment for Depression
- Mental Health: Depression
- Mental Health and HCV: Managing Depression
- Mental Health and HCV: Resources

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### *Mental Health Resources*

- **U.S. Suicide Prevention and Crisis Help Lines:**
  - ♦ (800) 273-8255 ..1-800-273-TALK
  - ♦ (877) 838-2838 ..1-877-Vet2Vet  
Veterans peer support line
  - ♦ (888) 628-9454  
Spanish-speaking suicide hotline
- **American Association of Suicidology**  
www.suicidology.org
- **Canadian Mental Health Association**  
www.cmha.ca
- **Centre for Suicide Prevention (Canada)**  
www.suicideinfo.ca  
Canadian crises numbers differ by province. Regional numbers are listed on this site. If you are in distress, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.
- **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)**  
www.dbsalliance.org  
(800) 826-3632
- **Freedom from Fear**  
www.freedomfromfear.org  
(718) 351-1717
- **The International Foundation for Research and Education on Depression (iFred)**  
www.ifred.org
- **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)**  
www.nami.org  
(800) 950-NAMI (6264)
- **National Institute of Mental Health**  
www.nimh.nih.gov  
(866) 615-6464
- **National Institute of Mental Health: Depression**  
www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/index.shtml
- **Screening for Mental Health, INC.**  
www.mentalhealthscreening.org
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**  
www.samhsa.gov  
(877) SAMHSA-7 or (877) 726-4727

*Disclaimer: The diagnosis and treatment of psychiatric and other medical disorders requires a trained medical professional. Information contained in this article is intended for educational purposes only. It should NOT be used as a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment of any mental/psychiatric disorders. Please consult a medical professional if the information here leads you to believe you or someone you know may have a psychiatric or other medical illness.*

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