Getting Yourself Into Therapy for Depression

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Seeing a Therapist for Depression

About 19 percent of adults in the United States encounter problems with mental illness each year. That number becomes even more staggering when you realize it's about one out of every five adult Americans — approximately 44 million people. The rates are lower but similar for children ages eight to 18.

These high numbers are concerning, but what might be even more troubling is the fact that only 41 percent of those 44 million adults sought mental health treatment for their condition. This means almost 26 million adults in the U.S. have untreated mental health problems.

These people might avoid services due to perceived risks of treatment that include:

- High cost
- Lack of convenient treatment options
- Fear of being stigmatized by others

These barriers may seem valid until you begin to consider the risks of not attending treatment, like:

- Lost wages due to missing work
- Increased likelihood of medical conditions for you and your family
- Suicide

Perhaps the greatest risk associated with not attending treatment is the certainty of continued mental health problems, like anxiety and depression. These symptoms do not usually alleviate on their own. If you want improvement, you must seek treatment.

Courage: A Vital Component

Trying something new takes courage. This is true for children trying their first bite of broccoli, teenagers giving a speech in school, or adults starting their new job.

The same is true for someone of any age beginning mental health treatment. The process is new, uncertain, and potentially scary.

Rather than seeking out therapy, people will convince themselves that everything is fine. They tell themselves their sadness, worry, irritability, sleeping problems, high stress, and physical tension will dissipate independently.

Worse, some people will turn to alcohol and other drugs to deal with their emotional issues. By covering up their symptoms with substances, the problems seem to evaporate.

Unfortunately, this practice allows depression, anxiety, and other illnesses to grow and develop while adding new problems like addiction and physical dependence.

The real courage comes from identifying the need for treatment and sharing this need with trusted people in your life. Shouting your symptoms across every social media platform isn't necessary or helpful — you only have to admit the truth to yourself.

Some people may avoid treatment because they are not certain their experience is unusual enough to warrant treatment.

Treatment Benefits

If the risks of not seeking treatment are not enough to spark the courage to start, consider the benefits of treatment. Treatment options include:

- Individual therapy
- Group therapy
- Inpatient hospitalization
- Partial hospitalization programs
- Intensive outpatient programs
- Residential treatment
- Support groups

Each option will have its own set of benefits related to time in treatment and intensity of the program.

Many people who are new to mental health treatment will find outpatient/individual therapy to be a good match. In this treatment, you will meet one-on-one with a therapist at a frequency determined to be the most helpful. Weekly sessions might be the most appropriate place to start and then modified as needed.

Next page: how to make the most of treatment.

Treatment Benefits

Just as there are many treatment options, there are many treatment styles a therapist might employ to decrease symptoms of depression. These styles are called therapeutic orientations. They reflect the type of education, training, and experience a therapist possesses.

Some therapists will only use techniques and strategies prescribed by one school of thought like:

- Person-centered therapy
- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)
- Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)
- Motivational interviewing
- Family systems approach

Other therapists will use an integrative approach that incorporates and blends together helpful aspects from many therapies for the best results.

The goal of therapy is constant: to improve your wellbeing. Whatever form of therapy is used, you can expect to see changes in:

- The way you think and what you think about
- Your feelings
- Your behaviors

Making the Most of Treatment

Showing up to your scheduled appointments will be important when beginning treatment, but it will take much more to achieve the desired results.

The therapeutic process is a joint effort between the therapist and the client. Even the greatest therapists cannot improve the symptoms of someone who is not active in treatment — just as the most willing client will not progress without a great therapist.

Here are some tips to make therapy more helpful:

- Be clear about your goals and expectations, even if you are unsure about your need for treatment
- Come prepared with information to discuss
- Learn about your therapist's style and their perception of your symptoms
- Take time between appointments to reflect on the content
- Experiment with treatment tools outside of session
- Be consistent, as missed appointments will disrupt the process

It will be important to take steps towards being an active therapy client to benefit from the process, but it will be essential to avoid disruptive therapy behaviors such as avoidance, which can present in many ways like:

- Not attending sessions as scheduled or coming late
- Minimizing your symptoms
- Not giving your therapist information about your thoughts, feelings, or history
- Spending too much time discussing issues unrelated to therapy

Avoidance is a defense mechanism some people will develop as a form of protection, but if you have an appropriate relationship with your therapist built on trust and understanding, avoidance will be unnecessary.

A lack of trust in your therapist means it's time for a new therapist. If you find yourself unable to trust a string of therapists, the issue may stem from you.

Talk to your therapist about it. Chances are great they can help.

Therapy is a fantastic tool that is readily available to those who seek it out. Forget about the barriers that might stand in your way and focus on the positives that can come from treatment.

As long as you practice openness, honesty, open-mindedness while evading avoidance, you can find yourself in a happier and healthier place.