

### Remember to get your flu shot

It is never too early to get a flu shot during flu season. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that all those aged 6 months and older get a flu shot each year. Get a flu shot soon to protect yourself and your family.

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# Care Connections<sup>SM</sup>

Sharing the  
knowledge for  
better health

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## Depression, anxiety, and chronic illness

For people with long-term illness, it can be hard to keep your thoughts and mood positive. Health issues can weigh on your mind. Let's talk about mental health and getting help.



**What is depression?** Sadness and depression are not the same thing. We can all feel sad, but it should not last. Depression is a mood illness that negatively affects how you think, act, and feel. It may not get better on its own. Have you felt down, upset, hopeless, or angry for over two weeks? Reach out to your doctor about depression.

**What is anxiety?** Stress and worry are part of life. But what if these feelings do not go away or disrupt your life? Then you may want to talk to your doctor about anxiety disorder. This is chronic worry or fear that worsens over time.

Depression and anxiety can and should be treated. First, talk with your doctor. There are all sorts of treatments available. You can join a support group or talk with loved ones. You can go to talk therapy (speaking with a mental health specialist). You can try other activities to lift your mood as well. Treating your mental health can make it easier to manage your illness. If not treated, depression and anxiety can make it hard for you to manage your illness. It can also make it harder to cope with other issues.

Look for the signs and be honest with yourself. Also remember, you don't deserve to feel bad. You do deserve help and support! Tell your doctor or care team how you feel. They can help you find a safe treatment plan. You can also reach out to your program nurse. Your nurse is there to listen and help you any way they can.

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## Tips for fighting seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression related to changes in seasons. Most cases of SAD start in the fall or winter and end in spring or early summer. But there is also a rare form of SAD that begins in late spring or early summer and ends in fall.

### What causes SAD?

It is thought that changes in the amount of daylight can cause SAD symptoms. Less sunlight in the winter can cause a drop in serotonin levels. Serotonin is a brain chemical that affects mood. Vitamin D plays a role in serotonin levels. Getting less sunlight reduces your levels of vitamin D. This can trigger SAD symptoms. Increased sunlight in the summer can disrupt your balance of melatonin. This is a chemical that plays a role in sleep patterns and mood. This may lead to “summer SAD”, the rare type that occurs in the summer months.

### Signs and symptoms of SAD may include:

- Feeling depressed
- Low energy
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Social withdrawal
- Problems sleeping

### How to manage SAD symptoms

There are several ways to help manage SAD symptoms:

- **Light therapy.** Spending time outside every day can help boost serotonin levels. Also, ask your doctor about light boxes. These add similar bright light indoors.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity can greatly improve your mood. Just 15 to 20 minutes a day of activity is all it takes. Bicycle, walk, swim, dance—do anything you enjoy. Also talk with your doctor about what type of exercise is best for you.
- **Medicines.** Certain antidepressants can make a difference for some. It may take a few weeks for the effects of the medicine to work. You might need to start treatment before you typically start feeling down.
- **Talk therapy.** This is also known as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT may help you learn how to change negative thought patterns and manage stress better.
- **Healthy eating.** A good diet helps boost your mood. Aim for a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, protein, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. Limit sugar and caffeine.

Work with your doctor or program nurse on a plan to manage SAD. Knowing what steps to take can help you beat sadness and enjoy the change of seasons.

## Protect yourself from infection

Infections can come and go and are often a common part of life. They are caused by many types of germs such as viruses and bacteria. While most infections are mild and clear on their own, some can be serious.

Here is a list of common infections and tips about how to stay safe:

- 1. Influenza (Flu):** a lung infection that can cause fevers, coughing, and sore throats. While most people get better within days, the flu can be serious. This is very true for older adults, infants, and those with weak immune systems. Getting the flu vaccine or shot each year is a great way to stay safe.
- 2. Pneumonia:** an infection that causes your lungs to fill with fluid. Pneumonia can cause coughing, fever, and trouble breathing. Shots can lower the risk of infection in children, older adults, and people with certain diseases.
- 3. COVID-19:** a disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It spreads when we cough, sneeze, or talk. Staying up to date on your COVID-19 shots can help you stay safe.
- 4. Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV):** a lung virus that can lead to mild, cold-like symptoms. However, it can be serious for infants and older adults. There are RSV treatments and vaccines for both infants and older adults. There is a new shot approved for expecting mothers 32 to 36 weeks pregnant. It can protect their child from RSV as soon as they are born. You can talk to your doctor and program nurse to learn more.

Here are some tips to stay safe from infections:

- Wash your hands often
- Practice good hygiene
- Avoid close contact with sick people
- Try not to touch your eyes, nose or mouth often