



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression

CBT-D is a highly recommended treatment for many individuals with depression.

What is the overall goal of CBT-D?

The overall goal of CBT-D is to improve the symptoms of depression by helping you to develop more balanced and helpful thoughts about yourself, others, and the future and by helping you spend more time engaging in pleasurable or productive activities. CBT-D helps Veterans to achieve personal goals and solve problems by learning and practicing new skills.



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For more information about CBT for Depression, please talk with your local VA provider.

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 Evidence-Based PSYCHOTHERAPIES

What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression (CBT-D)?

CBT-D is an effective treatment available to Veterans with depression in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system. CBT-D is a highly recommended treatment for many individuals with depression.

CBT-D is a short-term psychotherapy—or talk therapy—for treating symptoms of depression which may include:

- Feeling sad, depressed or hopeless
- Lack of interest or pleasure in activities
- Feeling worthless or having extreme guilt
- Being irritable or agitated
- Difficulty making decisions or concentrating
- Loss of energy or fatigue
- Increase or decrease in appetite or sleep

Does CBT for depression work?

CBT-D is one of the most studied and effective therapies developed for depression. CBT-D is based on decades of research and has been shown to be very effective with Veterans, specifically. Research supports the effectiveness of CBT-D for adolescents, younger adults, and older adults. Over 75% of people treated for depression show improvement following CBT-D. This treatment is at least as effective as medications, though both CBT and medications can be helpful in the treatment of depression for some people. Many Veterans with a history of depression continue to enjoy treatment benefits long after completing CBT-D.

What will I be doing in CBT-D?

In CBT-D, you will work with your therapist to establish specific treatment goals that will help you learn new ways of thinking about situations and cope with problems that come up in the future, even after therapy has ended. These new skills will relieve your depression and help you move forward in your life.

CBT-D can help to improve the quality of your life and overall level of functioning.

How is CBT-D different from other talk therapies?

Compared to some other types of talk therapy, CBT-D is more structured around teaching you skills and addressing specific goals for changes you would like to see in your life. You will spend time learning and practicing new ways to solve problems and new strategies to improve your mood.

How long does CBT-D last?

After you and your therapist have discussed your treatment goals, your therapist may be able to estimate the amount of time that will be required to attain those goals. CBT for depression typically requires 12 to 16 sessions to lead to significant improvement. Sessions last about 50 to 60 minutes when delivered individually and 90 minutes when delivered in a group. You will meet with your therapist regularly until the treatment goals have been reached.

If you decide to participate in CBT-D, you will be asked to:

- Attend sessions regularly
- Work together with your therapist to set therapy goals
- Address the most important issues during each session
- Practice the new CBT skills in your life outside of session
- Provide feedback to your therapist about your progress and how the therapy is helpful to you

It will be important for you to use the information that you learn during the therapy sessions and apply it to your everyday life to help you feel better.

What can I do to get ready for CBT-D?

One of the first tasks in therapy is to set some reasonable goals that will help you to feel better. It would be helpful to think about what difficulties you would like to see improve. For example, consider which areas of your life, such as your personal relationships, work-related activities, social activities, or physical health, that you would like to improve.

Can I receive CBT-D and take medication for depression?

Yes. For some people, medications can be an appropriate treatment in addition to CBT-D and may provide benefits to Veterans with depression. However, many people are successfully treated with CBT-D without taking medication for their depression.

How will I know if CBT-D has been helpful?

You will likely notice that your mood has improved by feeling less depressed, anxious, or irritable. You may also notice that you are getting more enjoyment or fulfillment out of your activities, finding yourself achieving goals you set at the start of therapy, and moving forward in your life.

