

Depression, chronic kidney disease and support

Acceptance of living with renal failure does not always come quickly or without the help of others. The human body is designed to handle the regular day-to-day stress that most people endure. However, having kidney disease can add many serious stressors on top of the normal day-to-day things our bodies are equipped to handle. These additional stressors can include financial burdens, inability to work because of dialysis, dietary limitations and other recommended treatment guidelines, and the illness itself.

Fortunately, most people do learn to live with kidney failure, although life may not be able to return to exactly how it was, it can still be good.

It takes time and energy to adjust and reach acceptance but there are things that can be done to help

Have you experienced any of the following?

- **Constant sadness**
- **More difficulty than usual with making decisions**
- **Easily upset**
- **More irritable than usual**
- **Being tired all the time**
- **Sleeping more or less than usual**
- **Waking up early in the morning if this had not been your normal routine**
- **Not wanting to eat or wanting to eat more than usual**
- **Constant thoughts of death (Seek professional help immediately.)**

If you have experienced any of the symptoms above, there are a few things you can do:

- Talk to your [doctor](#). Your doctor is the best place to start looking for psychological support. Your doctor is familiar with your medical conditions and general life situation. He or she can help you sort out what depression is and what might be something else such as insomnia, loss of weight or appetite and/or low energy can come from anaemia (low red blood cells) and toxin build up in the body which is attributed to kidney disease itself.

Renal units in New Zealand, offer specialised help for those adjusting to kidney failure. This professional guidance can be a great help to the patient and their family in coping through this process. Your renal physician, nurses' dialysis staff and social worker are available to assist you. Some renal units also have access to psychiatrists, psychologists, chaplains and Māori and Pacific support services should you desire them.

- You can also contact a kidney support group. There are a couple of local kidney support groups throughout the country. Information about these can be obtained from your renal unit social worker or staff, or from Kidney Health NZ's office:0800-543639 or: <https://www.kidney.health.nz/Patient-Information/Patient-Support/>
- Try to maintain relationships with family and friends although you may not feel your best or have a lot of energy. It is to be expected that with changes in health come changes in relationships, both from your side and from theirs. Remember that there is never a time that you will need the support of your friends and family more; social and psychological support is as important to your mental health as correct medical treatment is to your physical health
- Set projects and goals important to you to try and achieve without letting kidney failure stop you
- Try to stay active. working out and other forms of physical activity can ease symptoms of depression or anxiety and make you feel better. Exercise may also help keep depression and anxiety from coming back once you're feeling better.

How is depression treated?

Depression is typically treated in one or a combination of two ways: with medications and/or with psychotherapy.

Medications can only be prescribed by a qualified doctor or nurse practitioner. Psychiatrists are physicians who have specialized knowledge and training in the use of medications to affect what is going on in the brain to cause depression. It is always best to check with your nephrologist before seeing a psychiatrist, as

many medicines used to treat depression require dosage adjustments for those who are at end stage renal disease. Many medications in use today do not have the side effects that were common ten or more years ago. Some medicines do, however, take a few weeks to start helping you feel better.

Psychotherapy involves a series of meetings with a mental health professional. Psychotherapists can be psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, professional counsellors or religious counsellors. The first time or two you meet with a therapist; he or she will work with you to determine what is causing your depression and how they can assist you.

The most dangerous feature of depression is that if it is left untreated it can lead someone to be suicidal. If you ever have thoughts that you would be better off dead than continuing to live, please tell someone. Also helpline services are available right now in New Zealand that offer support, information and help for you and your parents, family, Whānau and friends. People and places you can turn to for help include:

National helplines

Need to talk? Free call or text [1737](tel:1737) any time for support from a trained counsellor.

[Lifeline](tel:0800543354) – 0800 543 354 (0800 LIFELINE) or free text 4357 (HELP).

[Suicide Crisis Helpline](tel:0508828865) – 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO).

[Healthline](tel:0800611116) – 0800 611 116

[Samaritans](tel:0800726666) – 0800 726 666

Depression-specific helplines

[Depression Helpline](tel:0800111757) – 0800 111 757 or free text 4202 (to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions).

www.depression.org.nz – includes The Journal online help service.

SPARX.org.nz – online e-therapy tool provided by the University of Auckland that helps young people learn skills to deal with feeling down, depressed or stressed.

All the services listed here are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week unless otherwise specified.

Summary

Depression can have many causes. In the case of someone who has just been diagnosed with chronic kidney disease there may be a lot of information to process about your physical health, which may lead to strong emotions about your life and how it may change. Similarly, once a person reaches end stage renal disease and begins dialysis, there are lifestyle adjustments to be made that could bring up feelings of despair. Many times, these feelings are temporary; however, if you find you're having difficulty don't hesitate to get the help you need.