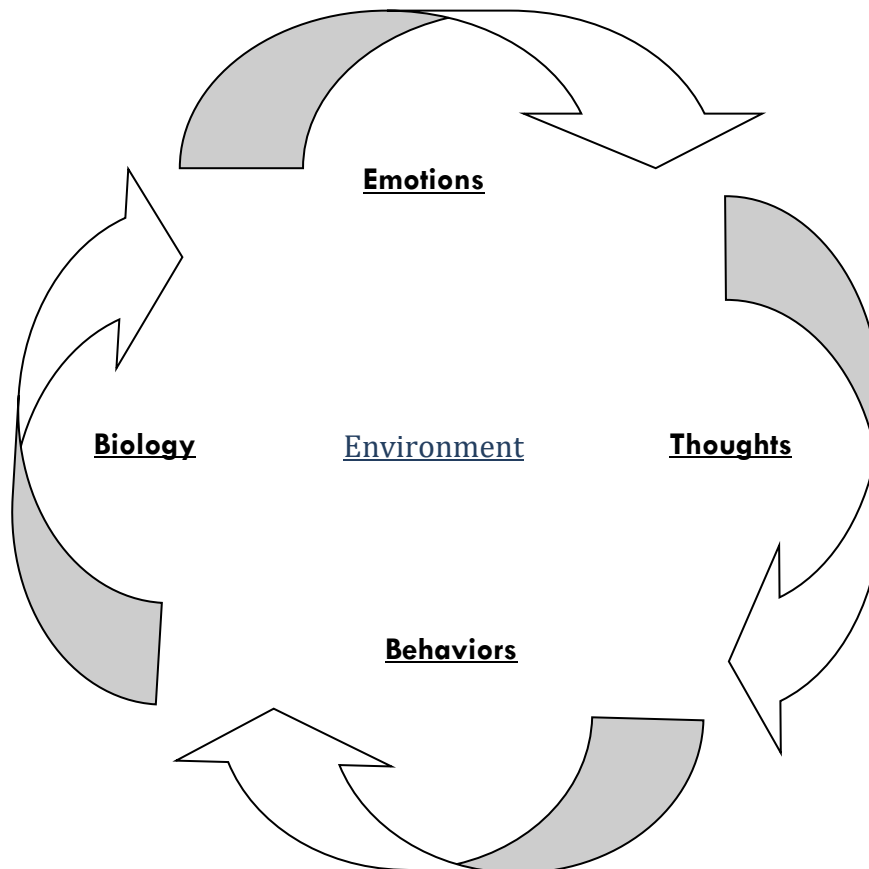

Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Tips for Recognizing and Managing Depression

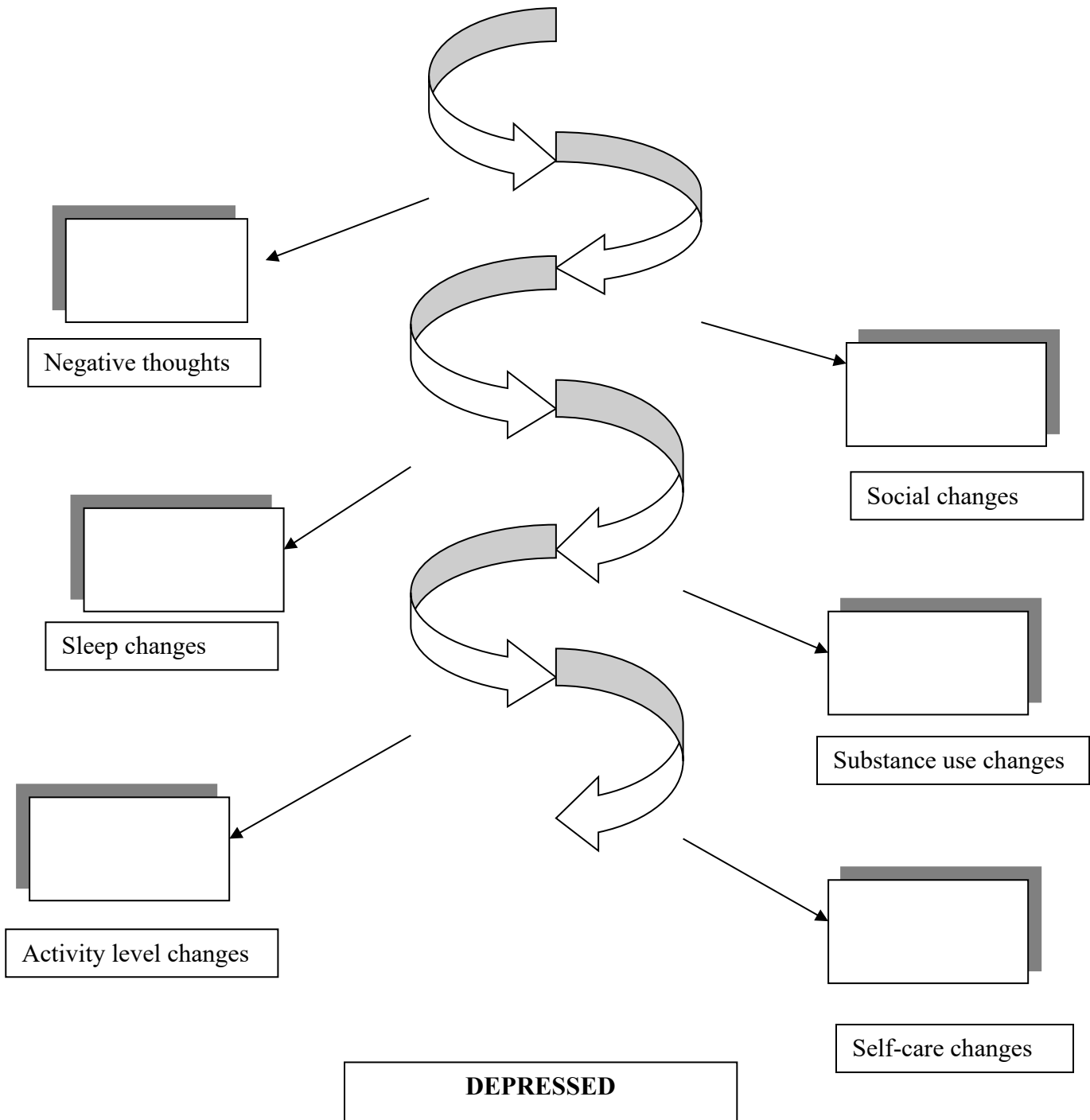
Depression Spiral

The figure below describes the spiral of depression. Depression is often influenced by several related factors. Our environment, our biology, our thoughts, our behaviors, and our emotions can all influence depression. Each factor can affect the others.



For example: Sue recently began working in a fast-paced, high-pressure job (**environmental factor**). She began to have thoughts such as “There’s no way I can get all this work done. It’s impossible. If I don’t get it done, I may lose my job.” (**thoughts**). As a result, she began to work longer hours, cut out all fun activities, and withdrew from family and friends (**behaviors**). With this decrease in many of the positive, rewarding aspects of her life, she began to feel down, depressed, and more irritable (**emotions**). As the depression cycle started to take hold, she had more difficulty sleeping and concentrating (**biology**), which led her to feel even more irritable and depressed (**emotions**) and she withdrew further from activities she enjoyed (**behaviors**). At some point in the cycle, the balance of chemicals in her brain also began to alter (**biology**), which further deepened the spiral of depression.

Recognizing Depression



Change Your Thinking

When we are stressed, our thinking tends to be mostly negative, sometimes unreasonably so. If we can figure out which thoughts aren't very realistic or are overly critical, and replace them with realistic and positive thoughts, we can cope better when we are depressed. When we are depressed, though, it can sometimes be hard to think about positive things. The challenge is to learn how to stop our negative thinking and change our thoughts to be more positive.

You can learn to challenge negative thoughts. The process of challenging negative thoughts works overtime with practice. Throughout the day, stop and evaluate what you're thinking. If you find that your thoughts are negative, try to find a way to put a positive spin on them.

Examples of typical negative self-talk and how you might change them include:

Stressful thinking	Positive thinking
I've never done it before.	It's an opportunity to learn something new.
It's too complicated.	Let's look at it from a different angle.
I don't have the resources.	Necessity is the mother of invention.
There's not enough time.	Let's re-evaluate some priorities.
There's no way it will work.	I can try to make it work.
I don't have the expertise.	I'll find people who can help me.
It's too radical a change.	Let's take a chance.
No one bothers to communicate to me.	I'll see if I can open the channels of communication.
I'm not going to get any better at this.	I'll give this another try.

If you notice you have lots of negative thoughts, don't expect to become an optimist overnight. Remember: practice makes perfect. If you keep changing your thoughts, you will eventually improve your mood.

Exercise

- Exercise increases your overall health and your sense of well-being, and also has some direct stress-busting benefits because it pumps up your endorphins—your brain's feel-good chemicals—and helps us to release built up stress energy.
- **It helps you deal with your stressors.** Exercise helps alleviate daily tensions and might also help you learn to better cope with your stressors. After a fast-paced game of racquetball or several laps in the pool, you'll often find that you've forgotten the day's problems.
- **It improves your mood.** Regular exercise can increase self-confidence and lower the symptoms of depression and anxiety.
- Remember: “walk before you run.” Start small and work your way up; you don't have to run a marathon to benefit from exercise. Any increase in physical activity—even a 15 minute walk—can reduce your stress. The most important thing is that you're doing something you enjoy!

Increasing Activities

When we perceive ourselves as overwhelmed or not feeling well, we often choose to avoid activities that we once enjoyed. However, by not spending time in those activities, we have fewer opportunities for enjoyment. One of the most important steps to help reduce depressive symptoms is to engage in potentially enjoyable or meaningful activities.

Setting Enjoyable and Meaningful Activities or Physical Activity Goals

- Is the goal realistic?
- Is a target date set for completion?
- Is the goal measurable?
- Is the goal broken down into small realistic parts?
- Once accomplished, what rewards will you use?
- Is the goal personally meaningful?
- Is a relapse plan clearly established?

An example of goal setting:

Week 1: Walk 8 minutes/day, 3 days/week
Week 2: Walk 10 minutes/day, 3 days/week
Week 3: Walk 12 minutes/day, 3 days/week
Week 4: Walk 12 minutes/day, 4 days/week
Week 5: Walk 14 minutes/day, 4 days/week
days/week

Week 6: Walk 16 minutes/day, 4 days/week
Week 7: Walk 16 minutes/day, 5 days/week
Week 8: Walk 18 minutes/day, 5 days/week
Week 9: Walk 20 minutes/day, 5 days/week
Week 10: Walk 20 minutes/day, 5

The Center for Integrated Healthcare gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the US Air Force in the preparation of all or part of this informational brochure.