

# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression

## FACT SHEET FOR CLINICIANS



Evidence-Based  
PSYCHOTHERAPIES

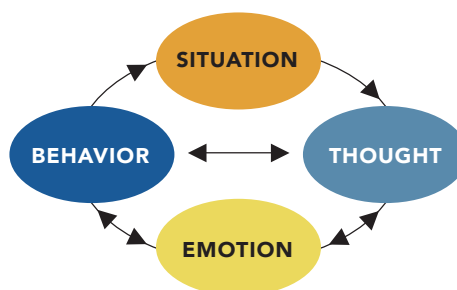
*Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression (CBT-D) is a structured, skill-based psychotherapy for depression and related problems. CBT-D is highly recommended in clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of depression.*

### CBT-D:

- Incorporates motivational enhancement strategies to promote engagement in therapy
- Targets extreme or maladaptive thinking and behaviors by implementing specific cognitive and behavioral strategies in an integrated fashion, based on an individualized case conceptualization
- Emphasizes a collaborative relationship between clinician and Veteran
- Focuses on reducing depression symptoms, achieving mutually established treatment goals, and improving quality of life

### What is CBT-D?

CBT-D is based on the cognitive behavioral model stating that negative mood (such as sadness, anxiety, and irritability) is a function of our **thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors**. Individuals with depression usually have three types of negative thoughts or beliefs involving **oneself** (such as worthlessness), **others** (such as dangerousness), and/or the **future** (such as hopelessness). Understanding these components helps the clinician to develop and use an *individualized case conceptualization approach* to address the Veteran's unique problems using specific CBT skills. In essence, the clinician formulates a case conceptualization as a roadmap to be used throughout treatment. It determines how a Veteran's beliefs and assumptions impact his or her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors on a day-to-day basis, thus maintaining the depressive symptoms.



CBT-D is focused on helping the Veteran to understand, identify, and respond to these thoughts, beliefs or behaviors. CBT-D sessions are also structured to ensure that: (1) the most important issues are discussed during the session, (2) the clinician understands and empathizes with the Veteran's concerns, (3) feedback is obtained regarding the helpfulness of the treatment, and (4) practice assignments are developed to integrate learned skills in the Veteran's life. The types of skills selected for helping the Veteran resolve his or her problems may be cognitively or behaviorally focused depending on the clinician's CBT case conceptualization and the Veteran's specific circumstances.

- **Cognitive strategies** are used to help teach the Veteran to identify negative automatic thoughts that are associated with negative mood states and develop an alternative response to such thoughts that is more accurate or helpful, with the goal of improving his/her mood.

- **Behavioral strategies** are used to help teach the Veteran to identify and schedule specific activities that are aimed to increase his/her pleasure and sense of mastery.

### How effective is CBT-D?

- Decades of research, including a number of randomized controlled trials, have shown support for the short-term as well as the long-term efficacy of CBT
- CBT-D is associated with significant engagement and reductions in symptoms of depression, as well as improved quality of life for Veterans (Karlin et al., 2012)
- CBT-D is recommended by the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Major Depressive Disorder (2009)

### Who does CBT-D work for?

CBT-D has been found to be efficacious for the treatment of mild, moderate, and severe depression for both younger and older adults. CBT-D is effective for Veterans with multiple medical and mental health comorbidities.

### What does CBT-D involve?

The treatment typically consists of 12–16 weekly or bi-weekly sessions that last 50–60 minutes when delivered individually, and 90 minutes when delivered in a group. The individualized CBT case conceptualization of a Veteran's problems is developed during the initial phase of treatment and used to guide the selection of the specific cognitive and behavioral strategies that would be the most beneficial for the Veteran. Therapists regularly evaluate Veterans' progress by reviewing patterns in his or her self-reported depressive symptoms and sharing this information with the Veteran. In addition, the therapist works with the Veteran to determine whether the goals they initially set for treatment were reached. The therapist encourages increased involvement in goal setting and skills practice as treatment progresses so that the Veteran masters these skills and continues using them to address future difficulties that emerge once treatment has ended.

The CBT-D protocol was adapted specifically for Veterans and Military Servicemembers and a comprehensive, standalone therapist manual, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression in Veterans and Military Servicemembers: Therapist Manual* (Wenzel, Brown, & Karlin, 2011) is available on the CBT-D Intranet site listed below.

The CBT-D protocol emphasizes:

1. Developing a clear, individualized CBT case conceptualization to enhance the understanding of the patient and to guide the selection and implementation of specific cognitive and behavioral strategies that best meet the patient's goals,
2. Fostering a strong therapeutic alliance between therapist and patient,
3. Structuring therapy sessions to promote close adherence to the CBT treatment model, and
4. Describing how to assist patients in learning specific CBT skills. The manual also includes fictitious cases that represented composites of depressed Veterans and Military Servicemembers to illustrate the application of CBT skills.

A companion therapist training video (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2010) is also available that includes therapist-patient clips, didactic instructions, and commentaries that illustrate how to deliver core components of CBT for Depression in Veterans and Military Servicemembers.

### Discussing CBT-D with Veterans

- CBT-D is an established, highly effective treatment for improving depression, quality of life, and overall functioning, including with Veterans
- Many Veterans experience additional benefits such as enhanced overall mood, healthier ways of coping, and improved sleep
- CBT-D has also been shown to be as effective as antidepressant medications, and combined treatment (medications and CBT) has been shown to be more effective than either treatment alone



## References

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### On the VA CBT-D Intranet site, you will find:

- Video demonstrations of clinicians demonstrating CBT-D skills
- VA CBT-D Therapist Manual: *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression in Veterans and Military Servicemembers*
- Updates on the VA CBT-D Training Program
- Information on becoming a VA CBT-D provider
- Journal articles and other resources



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For more information, contact your Local Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Coordinator or visit the VA CBT for Depression Intranet site: <http://vawww.mentalhealth.va.gov/ebp/cbt.asp>