

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT) FOR DEPRESSION

WHAT IS CBT?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (or “CBT”) is a proven, short-term “talk therapy” for depression.

THE “C” IN CBT

People who are depressed often think in ways that are overly negative or extreme. It’s like they look at themselves and life through dark and foggy lenses. This is the “cognitive” (or thinking) part of CBT. CBT teaches proven skills to recognize and change negative and extreme ways of thinking that contributes to depression.

THE “B” IN CBT

People who are depressed also spend little time doing things that make them feel good about themselves and about life— this is the “behavior” part of CBT. This often makes people feel worse, leading to what some experts call a “vicious cycle” of depression—doing few activities that bring joy or satisfaction makes one feel worse, which then makes them even less likely to do things that will make them feel better. CBT helps people to identify and do activities that bring them joy and meaning to their lives. It also teaches skills for reducing stress and managing strong emotions.

WHAT WILL I DO IN CBT?

First, you will work as a team with a CBT therapist to set goals for changes in your life that will guide treatment. During treatment, you’ll learn effective strategies to help you achieve these goals. This may include:

- Developing skills to recognize and change negative and extreme thinking that may be part of depression you are experiencing
- Working as a team with your therapist to figure out and plan activities that bring you feelings of joy or accomplishment
- Learning strategies to solve problems or make good choices
- Learning ways to communicate effectively with people in your life
- Developing skills to reduce stress and manage strong emotions

You and your therapist will come up with practice exercises that you can do outside of session to apply the new skills you learn to your everyday life.

HOW LONG DOES CBT TAKE?

Treatment usually lasts between 12 and 16 sessions. However, each person is different, and you and your therapist will work together to decide how many visits are right for you.

HOW OFTEN WOULD I MEET WITH MY CBT THERAPIST?

CBT sessions are usually provided weekly or every other week.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF CBT?

You may feel some discomfort when talking about difficult issues that you are currently facing in your life. Unlike some other treatments, CBT is “present-focused,” meaning that you will not spend much time focusing on your past.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS CBT?

CBT is the most studied talk therapy for depression. Supported by decades of research, CBT is recommended for the treatment of depression at the highest level by experts. And CBT has been shown to be effective with many Veterans with depression. On average, CBT reduces symptoms of depression by almost half. Because CBT helps people develop skills for changing thoughts and behaviors that are often at the root of depression, the benefits usually last well after treatment ends.