

# 5 STEPS FOR MANAGING MOOD

Several types of mood changes  
are common in MS

## QUICK FACTS

- **Grief** is a normal response to change and loss, which begins with the MS diagnosis and recurs periodically as the disease interferes with abilities. Grief ebbs and flows over time.
- **Depression** is a symptom of MS caused by the disease process itself, as well as a reaction to the challenges of life with a chronic illness. At least 50% of people with MS will experience a significant period of depression at some point in the disease course.
  - Symptoms of severe depression include feeling down or sad for long periods of time; losing interest in things that used to provide joy or pleasure; experiencing changes in sleep patterns and/or eating patterns, feeling physically or cognitively slowed, experiencing thoughts of self-harm.
  - Depression makes other MS symptoms feel worse, including fatigue, pain, cognitive challenges.
  - Unlike healthy grieving, depression does not heal itself and treatment by a mental health professional is recommended.
- **Anxiety** is a reaction to uncertainty & unpredictability that can range from mild to severe. Anxiety that interferes with your activities and relationships is best managed with the help of a mental health professional.

## STEP 1: RECOGNIZING MOOD CHANGES

The first step to managing mood changes is to be honest with yourself about what you're feeling.

**Grieving** can occur with any loss in your life. MS can impact your sense of self, plans and dreams for the future, career choices, and preferred activities.

**Depression** is experienced differently by different people. Ask yourself whether you have been feeling down, disconnected, irritable, hopeless, or helpless for days at a time.

**Anxiety** is a feeling we all experience. But severe anxiety causes sleep disruption, chronic worry, inability to concentrate, feelings of panic, heart palpitations, gastrointestinal problems, and muscle tension.

## STEP 2: ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

Describe your mood changes to your MS provider:

“I haven’t been feeling like myself. I’m sad all the time and irritable with everyone [or so anxious I can’t sleep; or so overwhelmed I just can’t enjoy anything in my life]. I really need some help to sort out what’s going on. Could you refer me to someone who is experienced in MS?”

## STEP 3: WORKING WITH THE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHO CAN HELP YOU

Mental health professionals include:

- **Psychiatrists** are medical doctors who can prescribe medications, as needed, to treat mood changes. They may also provide talk therapy.
- **Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners** provide talk therapy as well as medication management.
- **Psychologists, social workers, and counselors** provide talk therapy.

The optimal treatment for mood changes involves a combination of talk therapy (e.g., cognitive behavior therapy) and medication, if needed. Physical activity, exercise, (as recommended by a Physical Therapist) and diet (as recommended by a Registered Dietitian) have also been shown to positively improve mood.

## STEP 4: HELPING OTHERS UNDERSTAND YOUR MOOD CHANGES

Mood changes can feel terrible on the inside but be invisible and/or confusing to others. It’s up to you to describe your feelings in ways they can understand.

- “I’m not sure why I’m so prickly and irritable, but I’m going to ask my MS provider to help me figure out why.”
- “I’m feeling so anxious about everything right now that I can’t even concentrate. I really need to get a handle on this.”
- “We’ve had so many changes and losses because of MS. Our shared grief is helping us get ready to figure out our next steps.”

## STEP 5: TAPPING HELPFUL RESOURCES

Can Do MS has a variety of helpful programs and resources when it comes to symptom management. Check out our website to explore our offerings and learn more: [CanDo-MS.org](https://www.CanDo-MS.org)

