



## Algorithm of Depression

### Steps to Diagnose and Treat Depression

**Step 1** Ask the following questions:

Have you been feeling down, depressed or hopeless?  
Have you often been bothered by little interest or pleasure in doing things?

If "NO" to both questions, depression is unlikely.  
If "YES" to either, proceed with the following clinical evaluation.

**Step 2** Ask if the patient has the following symptoms:

- Depressed mood
- Weight change
- Psychomotor problems
- Excessive guilt
- Suicidal ideation
- Anhedonia
- Sleep disturbance
- Lack of energy
- Poor concentration

To diagnose major depression, five or more of those symptoms are required including depressed mood or anhedonia during the same two-week period, causing clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational or other important areas of functioning.

**Step 3** Consider whether there is a possibility of underlying Bipolar Disorder with these symptoms:

- Mood lability
- Rapid speech
- Episodes of euphoria and grandiosity
- Decreased need for sleep
- Impulsive behavior
- Poor judgment – spending sprees, inappropriate sexual behavior

If there is evidence suggestive of Bipolar Disorder, consider referral for psychiatric evaluation.

**Step 4** Take a tiered approach to medication to treat depression, prescribing:

1. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitor

If a patient fails to achieve remission after a 12-week trial of medication at therapeutic doses, try:

2. Another SSRI, or
3. An SNRI (Venlafaxine)

**Step 5** Continue treatment on the antidepressant for a minimum of 10 months.

Source: Magellan Behavioral Health, 2009.