

## How to Score the PHQ-9

### Major depressive disorder (MDD) is suggested if:

- Of the 9 items, 5 or more are checked as at least 'more than half the days'
- Either item 1 or 2 is checked as at least 'more than half the days'

### Other depressive syndrome is suggested if:

- Of the 9 items, between 2 to 4 are checked as at least 'more than half the days'
- Either item 1 or 2 is checked as at least 'more than half the days'

PHQ-9 scores can be used to plan and monitor treatment. To score the instrument, tally the numbers of all the checked responses under each heading (not at all=0, several days=1, more than half the days=2, and nearly every day=3). Add the numbers together to total the score on the bottom of the questionnaire. Interpret the score by using the guide listed below.

Guide for Interpreting PHQ-9 Scores		
Score	Depression Severity	Action
0 - 4	None-minimal	Patient may not need depression treatment.
5 - 9	Mild	Use clinical judgment about treatment, based on patient's duration of symptoms and functional impairment.
10 - 14	Moderate	Use clinical judgment about treatment, based on patient's duration of symptoms and functional impairment.
15 - 19	Moderately severe	Treat using antidepressants, psychotherapy or a combination of treatment.
20 - 27	Severe	Treat using antidepressants with or without psychotherapy.

### Functional Health Assessment

The instrument also includes a functional health assessment. This asks the patient how emotional difficulties or problems impact work, life at home, or relationships with other people. Patient response of 'very difficult' or 'extremely difficult' suggest that the patient's functionality is impaired. After treatment begins, functional status and number score can be measured to assess patient improvement.

**Note:** Depression should not be diagnosed or excluded solely on the basis of a PHQ-9 score. A PHQ-9 score  $\geq 10$  has a sensitivity of 88% and a specificity of 88% for major depression.<sup>1</sup> Since the questionnaire relies on patient self-report, the practitioner should verify all responses. A definitive diagnosis is made taking into account how well the patient understood the questionnaire, as well as other relevant information from the patient.

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**Reference:** Kroenke K, Spitzer RL, Williams JB. The PHQ-9: Validity of a brief depression severity measure. J Gen Intern Med. 2001;16(9):606-613.