

Managing Depression

Depression is a period of low mood, sometimes following a period of stress or bereavement.

Occasionally it seems to "appear from nowhere." Symptoms include loss of energy and motivation, changes in sleep or eating patterns, and lack of enjoyment of life.

How can I help myself feel better?

Set a small goal each day:

Depression can rob us of energy and motivation. Completing even one small task each day can help us feel more positive. Some ideas for helping you to achieve this are:

- Choose a goal that is achievable. Although you need to stretch yourself, it's important to set yourself up for success rather than failure.
- If something seems too hard, break it down into smaller steps. Then decide how many steps you can achieve that day.
- Make sure you reward yourself for your efforts. Get others to praise you too.

Remember no one can do as much as usual when depressed. Feel good about what you have achieved rather than worrying about things you couldn't do.

Making a commitment to looking after your physical self:

Making lifestyle changes will help you manage your depression. Try to maintain these healthy habits when you are well, to reduce the risk of becoming depressed again.

- Try to eat a balanced diet containing plenty of fruit and fresh vegetables, and complex carbohydrates (like bread, pasta, rice and potatoes).
- Treat yourself occasionally to foods you enjoy.

- Try to reduce alcohol or cannabis. Although they may seem to help at the time, they often have a hangover effect, which adds to depression.
- Try to get some physical exercise each day. Although this might be the last thing you feel like, pushing yourself to do some regular exercise really does help.
- Avoid sleeping during the day. This is often tempting, but won't help your depression and may mean you don't sleep well at night.
- Don't drink tea or coffee in the evening.
- Don't lie awake in bed for more than 30 minutes. Get up and do something relaxing, like listening to music or watching TV. Try not to worry about not sleeping - sleep will evade you even more.

It's not unusual to lose interest in sex when depressed. Let your partner know your lack of interest doesn't mean you have lost interest in them. Try to share other enjoyable activities with your partner, and remind them you still care about them.

Learning New Skills

Problem Solving:

Learning effective problem-solving skills will help you cope better with depression and reduce the risk of a recurrence. Some tips for problem-solving are:

- Identify exactly what the problem is.
- Brainstorm ideas for resolving the problem.
- Make a list of good points and bad points for each solution.
- Decide which ideas are workable.
- Decide which plan will be the best. List the steps needed to solve the problem and follow your plan.
- If you find yourself worrying all the time - Ask yourself whether a problem-solving approach might help. Another tip worth trying is to set a time limit for worrying. You can choose to defer your worry to a specific "worry time" (eg, from 7.00-7.30pm each evening).

Stopping gloomy thoughts -

Sometimes it can be hard to stop gloomy or miserable thoughts. Some tips for trying to focus on more positive things are:

- Make a list of your good points. If this seems too hard, ask someone you trust to help you. Look at this list when you feel begin to feel down.
- Try to remember happy times and good things that have happened in the past. Looking through a favourite photograph album might help.
- When something good happens, write it down in a notebook, especially nice things people say to you. When you feel low look through your notebook.
- Plan to do things you have enjoyed in the past, even if you don't really feel like it right now (eg, go to a funny movie, visit a friend, go to the beach).
- Listen to music you enjoy - making sure you choose cheerful music.
- Treat yourself to something you like - you deserve it!

Counselling

Talking with a Counsellor or Psychologist is one of the best ways of dealing with depression. They will help you explore what the depression may be about. You will also learn to recognise stresses in your life and develop strategies to manage them. This is an important way of reducing feelings of depression. It also helps reduce the possibility of depression returning. If your symptoms are interfering with work or study, or have lasted some time, it would be helpful for you to discuss this with your GP.

Counselling will help you become more effective at letting people know how you feel and what you would like from them.