

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Working Through Depression

Recovering from depression requires action, but taking action when you're depressed is hard. It's the Catch-22 of depression recovery. The things that help the most are the things that are most difficult to do. Remind yourself of one thing: **you are not your depression**. This state of pain or panic is not an integral part of you and it **will** pass.

Here is a short check list for when you are feeling defeated, down, depressed, or inexplicably blue:

1. To move yourself out of the funk, start with small goals and stay focused.
2. Challenge negative thinking.
3. Check in with support groups or close relationships.
4. Exercise! Bipedal motion helps keep our brain and body in balance.
5. Breathe deeply.
6. Eat nutritious food and drink lots of water.
7. Know when to get help.

1 Start with small goals and stay focused

The key to depression recovery is to start with a few small goals and slowly build from there. Take things day by day and reward yourself for each accomplishment. You may not have much energy, but you probably have enough to take a short walk around the block or pick up the phone to call a loved one. The steps may seem small, but if you make time for one or more each day, they will help to bring about change.

2 Challenge negative thinking

Depression puts a negative spin on everything, including the way you see yourself, the situations you encounter, and your expectations for the future. You can't break out of this pessimistic mindset by "just thinking positive." The trick is to replace negative thoughts with more balanced thoughts.

Ways to challenge negative thinking:

- **Think outside yourself.** Ask yourself if you'd say what you're thinking about yourself to someone else. If not, stop being so hard on yourself. Think about less harsh statements that offer more realistic descriptions.
- Remind yourself of ONE thing: **you are not your depression**. This state of pain or panic is not an integral part of you, and it is not your fault. And it **will** go.
- **Keep a "negative thought log"**. Whenever you experience a negative thought, jot down the thought and what triggered it in a notebook. Review your log when you're in a good mood. Consider if the negativity was truly warranted.
- **Replace negatives with positives.** Review your negative thought log. Then, for each negative thought, write down something positive. For instance, "My boss hates me. She gave me this difficult report to complete" could be replaced with, "My boss must have a lot of faith in me to give me so much responsibility."
- **Socialize with positive people.** Notice how people who always look on the bright side deal with challenges, even minor ones, like not being able to find a parking space. Then consider how you would react in the same situation. Even if you have to pretend, try to adopt their optimism and persistence in the face of difficulty.

3 Check in with support groups and supportive relationships

Getting the support you need plays a big role in lifting the fog of depression, but the very nature of depression makes it difficult to reach out for help. Isolation and loneliness, however, make depression even worse. The thought of reaching out to even close family members and friends can seem overwhelming. You may feel ashamed, too exhausted to talk, or guilty for neglecting the relationship. Remind yourself that this is the depression talking.

Try to keep up with social activities even if you don't feel like it. When you're depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell, but being around other people will make you feel less depressed.

Join a support group for depression. Being with others who are dealing with depression can go a long way in reducing your sense of isolation. You can also encourage each other, give and receive advice on how to cope, and share your experiences. To locate a depression support group in your area, use the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance's Support Group Locator.

5 tips for reaching out:

1. Talk to one person about your feelings.
2. Help someone else by volunteering.
3. Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly.
4. Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club.
5. Confide in a counselor, therapist, or clergy member.

4 Exercise!

Exercising may be the last thing you feel like doing, but exercise is a powerful tool for dealing with depression! When it's difficult to even move, start exercising simply by going outside...winter or summer, sun or wind or rain. Start with a small goal of walking two or three houses away. When your body becomes activated you may find you have incentive to walk farther. If that's all you can do, then try to do this once per hour. You can also run away from your problem—or dance, ride or swim it away! Even better results happen when you exercise in groups. The key is to pick an activity you enjoy, so you're more likely to keep up with it.

To get the most benefit, aim for 30 minutes of exercise per day. But you can start small. Short 10minute bursts of activity can have a positive effect on your mood. Scientists haven't figured out exactly why exercise is such a potent antidepressant, but evidence suggests that physical activity increases mood-enhancing neurotransmitters in the brain, raises endorphins, reduces stress, and relieves muscle tension – all things that can have a positive effect on depression.

Relying on drugs is often not the answer to many forms of depression. Consider diet, water, breathing and exercise valuable medications! About one third of all people aren't going to get better with any kind of pharmaceutical medication and, in fact, moderate exercise outperformed a leading antidepressant (Zoloft) in easing symptoms of depression.

Expose yourself to a little free vitamin D everyday! Sunlight (or natural light) has been found to relieve forms of depression and it goes well with exercise.

5 Breathe deeply

When we are depressed we tend to breathe shallowly. By deepening your breath and keeping the rhythm consistent, you increase the amount of oxygen that is reaching your lungs, blood, organs, and cells. This oxygen, of course, is vital for your physiological systems to operate properly. Deep breathing also relaxes your body and mind so that you can examine your negative thoughts and replace them with more positive ones.

6 Eat a healthy, mood-boosting diet and drink lots of water

What you eat has a direct impact on the way you feel. Aim for a balanced diet of protein, complex carbohydrates, fruits, and vegetables.

- **Don't neglect breakfast.** A solid breakfast provides energy for the day.
- **Don't skip meals.** Going too long between meals can make you feel irritable and tired, so aim to eat something at least every 3-4 hours.
- **Minimize sugar and refined carbohydrates.** You may crave sugary snacks, baked goods, or comfort foods such as pasta or french fries. These "feel-good" foods can lead to a crash in mood and energy. Replace these desires with a large glass of water!
- **Focus on complex carbohydrates.** Foods such as baked potatoes, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, oatmeal, whole grain breads, and bananas can boost serotonin levels!
- **Boost your B vitamins.** Deficiencies in B vitamins such as folic acid and B-12 can trigger depression. To get more B vitamins eat more citrus fruit, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs.
- **Practice mindful eating.** Slow down and pay attention to the full experience of eating. Enjoy your food!
- **Omega-3 fatty acids play an essential role in stabilizing mood.** Foods rich in certain omega-3 fats can give your mood a big boost. The best sources are fatty fish. Vegetarian sources include vegetable oils and nuts (especially walnuts), flax, hemp, soybeans, and tofu.
- **Drink lots of water!** Water is essential for combating depression and fighting fatigue. Water helps improve mood, motor function, mind power, skin problems, and a host of other maladies. Always drink at least 40 ounces of water a day. If you drink soda or coffee, it is good to increase your water intake, since caffeine acts as a diuretic, pulling water from the body. The benefits are enormous and the cost is minimal. Drink more water!

7 Know when to get additional help

If you find your depression getting worse and worse, seek professional help. Needing additional help doesn't mean you're weak. Sometimes the negative thinking in depression can make you feel like you're a lost cause, but depression can be treated and you can feel better! HelpGuide.org:

http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_tips.htm