

Depression: Facts, Myths & Tips for Feeling Better

Facts

Depression is very common

Nearly 20% of the U.S. population experiences a significant depression during their lifetime.

Depression is treatable

Because depression affects so many, and can have such a powerful and negative impact on life, there has been an enormous amount of research conducted on how to reduce symptoms and improve functioning. As a result, we now know there are behaviors **YOU** can engage in to make yourself feel better.

Depression is not a weakness

People suffer from depression for a variety of reasons, biological, environmental and behavioral. Research indicates that “mental weakness” is **NOT** one of the reasons people become depressed.

Depression is not something you are powerless against

Evidence suggests that you can directly impact the intensity and duration of depression by what you do and by altering the way you think about certain things.

The Downward Spiral

Depression often begins as a drop in mood due to an environmental or biological trigger that makes people feel less like being active. Being less active, in turn, often causes people to experience an even lower mood and feel even less like being active, and so the cycle begins.



1. Low mood begins and you feel like doing less.
2. You stop doing the things you enjoy and become less active.
3. Your low mood becomes even lower and you feel like doing even less.
4. Cycle continues until you begin to completely isolate and cease all pleasurable activities **OR** you reverse the cycle.

How can I start feeling better?

The first and best way to reverse the downward cycle is to get active! Your body produces its own anti-depressants every time you exercise or do something pleasurable. Regular exercise is one of the very best ways to improve your mood. In fact some studies have shown that a solid exercise program is as effective as psychotherapy or anti-depressant medication for some people. *See *physical activity section of handout*

Force yourself to do something you found pleasurable before depression. This may be different for everyone and it doesn't matter if its gardening, playing bridge, walking, reading a novel, or simply talking to a close friend. What matters is that YOU find the activity pleasurable! Even if you don't feel like doing something pleasurable for yourself, DO IT ANYWAY. We call this the "fake it until you make it" principle.

Educate yourself! Often people feel powerless against medical conditions because they do not understand what is happening in their body. Just by reading this handout you know more than most people about depression. Knowledge is power when you can apply it, and make yourself feel better. *See *recommended reading list at the bottom of this handout*

Begin to notice unhealthy and unhelpful thoughts! In addition to how we behave, how we think influences our mood directly. Notice recurrent or alarming thoughts that have an impact on your mood. Ask yourself "is this type of thinking helping me or hurting me?" if your answer is "its hurting me" here are some things you can do: *see *"disputation of negative thoughts" section of handout*

- Challenge the negative thought. Is it truly accurate? Where's the proof? Become your own scientific investigator and collect the facts.
- Reframe the negative thought. How can I think differently about this problem, situation, or view of myself? Allow yourself to view a situation from more than one angle, how might my spouse, friend, or someone I admire view this same problem?
- Use the "best friend" scenario. How would you help your best friend if he or she was having these same thoughts? Would you criticize him or her as harshly as you criticize yourself?

Remember, YOU know YOU better than anyone else. You likely know what kinds of activities, thoughts and reinforcement you respond to. Doing what's easiest and most "doable" is the key. Pick 1 or 2 things that are easy and get started feeling better TODAY!

* Use the following handout sections to guide you through behavioral and thinking exercises to help you manage your depressive symptoms, improve your functioning and to begin living your life well again.

Recommended readings on managing depression

- "Feeling Good" by Dr. David D. Burns
- "Mind over Mood" by Greenberger and Pedesky
- "Living Life Well" by Dr. Patricia Robinson
- "Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers" by Dr. Robert M. Sapolsky

Disputation: Challenging Upsetting Thinking

Examine your thoughts for key words:

1. must, need, got to, have to, should (**unrealistic standards**)
2. never, always, completely, totally, all everything, everyone (**predictions / labeling**)
3. awful, terrible, horrible, unbearable, disaster, worst ever (**labeling / predictions**)
4. jerk, slob, creep, hypocrite, bully, stupid (**labels**)

Dispute or question the accuracy of the questionable thoughts.

1. Am I upsetting myself unnecessarily? How can I see this another way?
2. Is my thinking working for or against me? How could I view this in a less upsetting way?
3. 3. What am I demanding must happen? What do I *want* or *prefer*, rather than *need*?
4. 4. Am I making something *too terrible*? Is it really that awful? What would be so terrible about that?
5. Am I *labeling* a person? What is the *action* that I don't like?
6. What's untrue about my thoughts? How can I stick to the *facts*? What's the proof for what I am thinking or believing about this?
7. Am I using extreme, black-and-white language? What less extreme words might be more accurate?
8. Am I fortune telling or mind reading in a way that gets me upset or unhappy? What are the *odds* (percent chance -- e.g., there is a 5% chance...) that it will really turn out the way I'm thinking or imagining?
9. What are my options in this situation? How would I like to respond?
10. Create more moderate, helpful, or realistic statements to replace the upsetting ones.
11. Have I had any experiences that show that this thought might not be totally true?
12. If my best friend or someone I loved had this thought, what would I tell them?
13. If my best friend or someone I loved knew I was thinking this thought, what would they say to me? What evidence would they point out to me that would suggest that my thought is not completely true?
14. Are there strengths in me or positives in the situation that I am ignoring? Am I underestimating my ability to cope with unfortunate circumstances?
15. When I am not feeling this way, do I think about this situation any differently? How?
16. Have I been in this type of situation before? What happened? What have I learned from prior experiences that could help me now?
17. Five years from now, if I look back on this situation, will I look at it any differently? Will I focus on any different part of my experience?
18. Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?