

Top Tips for Managing Depression

Set Goals

When you feel down you lose interest in activities you usually enjoy and you don't feel like doing much. Not doing things makes you feel better in the short-term, but worse in the longer term. Doing things (*especially* if you don't feel like it) will help to improve your mood. When you're planning activities, make sure your goals are realistic and achievable. Setting unachievable goals can make you feel worse not better. If you're having a bad day, modify your goals so they're realistic.

Schedule Pleasant and Mastery Activities

Two types of activities in particular will have a positive effect on mood: Pleasant Activities – you won't necessarily enjoy these activities when your mood is low, but persisting with them will help to improve your mood, and Mastery Activities – activities you don't necessarily like doing at the time, but that make you feel good when they're finished, like exercise or housework. Make sure you're engaging in pleasant and mastery activities every day.

Identify Stressors

One step you can take to manage depression is to understand the factors contributing to your mood. Keep in mind that it's possible to feel depressed even when everything in your life is going well so if you can't identify any causes don't be too concerned. You don't necessarily need to know what's caused your depression to improve mood.

If you know what's contributing to your mood look at whether there's anything you can do to change your situation. For example, if your work/life balance is weighed heavily towards work this could be affecting your mood. Brainstorm how you can improve your balance – can you delegate some of your work to others? Can you complete tasks to 80% of your ability until you're feeling on top of things?

Manage Your Thoughts

Negative thoughts are a symptom of depression. They also make our mood worse because when you're depressed your negative thoughts feel more true. When you're feeling down, write your thoughts out on paper. Look at your thoughts objectively and ask: Am I being realistic or am I focusing on the negatives? Am I drawing general conclusions from a single example? Would I be thinking like this if I wasn't depressed?

Switch Off

Whether they're true or not, negative thoughts are unhelpful. It can be difficult to switch off from thoughts when you're depressed but try to limit the amount of time you spend thinking by keeping busy. It's also a good idea to avoid making big decisions until your mood improves.

DEPRESSION

Depression affects 1 in 6 people but it often goes undiagnosed because people mistakenly believe that if they can get out of bed, they can't be depressed. It's not the case.

Symptoms of depression may vary from person to person and also in their severity, but the most common symptoms are:

- Low mood
- A lack of motivation
- Tiredness and lethargy
- Feeling easily overwhelmed
- A loss of appetite or overeating
- Sleep problems
- Irritability or agitation
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Self-criticism
- Concentration problems
- Indecisiveness
- A preference to be alone
- A loss of interest in activities that you'd usually enjoy

The most effective treatment for depression is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), either alone or in combination with medication.

This tips sheet covers basic strategies for low mood. If your low mood persists, speak to your GP about a referral to a clinical psychologist.