

What is Depression?

Depression is a response to problems in living. When we become exhausted in our efforts to cope with life, we begin to experience symptoms of depression. Following is a list of common symptoms of depression. Make a check in the box beside any symptom you have had almost daily for the past two weeks.

1. Anger or irritability
2. Sadness
3. Sleeping too much or too little
4. A lack of interest in others and in activities you usually enjoy
5. Guilt, self critical thoughts, feeling inadequate or worthless
6. Feeling tired most of the time
7. Concentration difficulties
8. Appetite change — eating significantly more or less
9. Feeling very “slowed down” or very “speeded up”
10. More aches and pain
11. Thoughts of suicide or death in general

Total Symptoms: _____

If you checked four or more symptoms, talk with your health care provider. Also, use this booklet to make a plan to address these symptoms.

This booklet describes seven coping strategies for addressing symptoms of depression, solving problems in living and creating the life you want.

The Cycle of Depression

People become depressed for many reasons. Most often, depression is related to stressful life circumstances, such as marital problems, death of a loved one, loss of a job, or a child leaving home. Depression may also be related to physical problems such as chronic pain or medical illness.

Depression Occurs In Three Ways

The Body Feels Depressed

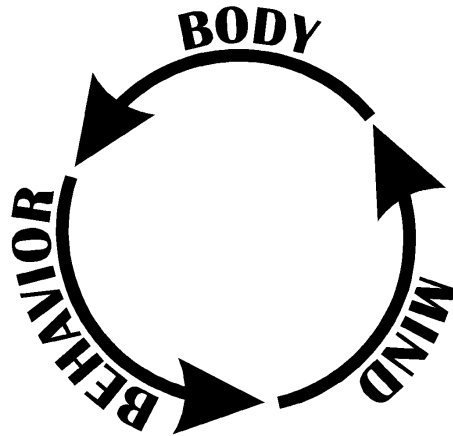
When the body is depressed, a person sleeps poorly, eats differently, has less energy, struggles with concentration, and has more aches and pains.

Behavior Is Depressed

When behavior is depressed, a person does much less than usual. She/he talks less, produces less, and socializes less.

The Mind Is Depressed

When the mind is depressed, thinking changes. A depressed person experiences more intensely negative and painful thoughts about the past, the present and the future.



A person's body, behavior, and mind interact continuously. Once depression becomes a problem, this interaction may lead to a "downward spiral" in mood, hopefulness and energy. Two courses of action help reverse the downward direction and create a "positive spiral."

1. Strategic Use of Coping Strategies

Use of active coping strategies helps you reverse the downward spiral of depression. When you address life problems with effective strategies, you have more opportunities to create positive conditions in your life context. **This booklet suggests seven coping strategies for you to use to restore your body, behavior and mind and to effectively address life problems.** If you make a concerted effort to work with your health care provider in using these strategies, you can make significant and lasting changes to your lifestyle.

2. Use of Medications

Medications may also help you to feel better. Antidepressant medications help restore the presence of neurotransmitter substances that become depleted by stress. However, these medications work somewhat slowly. The impact of effective coping is more immediate. If you decide to use medications, use coping strategies as well. Coping strategies will complement the action of medications on the body's neurochemistry.

The First Strategy:

Hoping...Planning...Doing

Hope is the foundation of a healthy life. Without hope, most people avoid constructive activity. Another way of stating this is that hopefulness is a good predictor of action. In turn, action is a good predictor of mood improvement.

Try this exercise to help you increase your sense of hopefulness.

*Sit in a quiet place for a few minutes and ask yourself about your explanation of your current troubles. Are you blaming yourself? If so, stop. You are well-intentioned and worthy of self-respect. Decide upon an explanation for your current difficulties that reflects a sense of respect for who you are. You may be stressed or overwhelmed or simply lacking skills you need to overcome challenging circumstances. Write down your **revised** explanation of your present situation here.*

Planning and doing are also important behavioral skills for coping with stress and depression.

With a little hope, you can make a “behavioral health plan” to address needed changes in your daily life. Read and respond to each of the following seven steps to make a behavioral health plan for this week.

1. **Choose an area of life that you want to make better.** Possible areas include: enjoying things alone or with others, accomplishing difficult and unpleasant tasks, talking to or “making connections” with others, contentment with your work, sensual experiencing, or imagining a better future. Write down your choice here.

2. **Imagine yourself doing something different in the activity area you choose.** Write down what you imagine.

3. **Plan a specific time and place** to engage in an activity that represents making an improvement to the area of life you want to make more satisfying.

Activity: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

4. During and after you conduct this “experiment in mood change,” **watch what happens**, *inside* you (your thoughts, feelings and behaviors) and *outside* of you (what others say and do). Write down your observations here.

Inside you: _____

Outside of you: _____

5. **Think about your findings** or results.
6. **Talk with others** about your results and draw conclusions. Write down your conclusions here.

7. **Plan your next “behavioral health plan.”**

Activity: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

Try to make a behavioral health plan *weekly* for the next month. The positive impact of small changes in two or three areas of your life can become highly significant with three or four weeks of effort. Try to find a friend who will support your on-going use of this strategy.

The Second Strategy:

Building Acceptance and Making Value-Based Choices

We often respond to a difficult circumstance, whether it is internal or external, with an action that moves us away from the source of unwanted distress. While we may avoid some external stresses, we cannot avoid painful internal events. Internal events include thoughts and feelings — positive and negative. *Psychological acceptance* is a strategy that involves actively embracing unwanted, painful thoughts and feelings.

When we use psychological acceptance strategies, we are more free to make decisions about our behavior. We can make choices to behave in accordance with our values. Our daily activities take on greater meaning when they reflect our values rather than our attempts to control unwanted thoughts and feelings. Try these exercises to improve your skills in using strategies of psychological acceptance and value-based behavioral planning.

1. Write down feelings (for example, fear, sadness, anxiety, depression, panic, anger) that you have difficulty tolerating.

2. Decide on a psychological acceptance procedure or method for observing unwanted feelings and thoughts.

Options include visualizing the feeling or seeing or listening to the words associated with the feeling. You may use the phrase, “I am having the sensation of:

_____.”

or “I am having the thought that: _____.”

3. Follow this procedure during acceptance or self-observation practice periods.

Take four deep breaths and move into “observation mode.”

Start to use your method of observation to help you stay in the “observation mode” (i.e., visualize your thoughts or use a phrase to prompt acceptance).

Practice daily for 5 to 10 minutes for a week. Record the number of minutes you practice each day.

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

Day 5: _____

Day 6: _____

Day 7: _____

When you are ready, begin using the psychological acceptance procedure in daily situations that provoke painful thoughts and feelings. Record situations where you used your breathing and observation method and made a behavior choice that reflected your values.

The Third Strategy:

Appreciating Your Mind and Body

Using this strategy will help you become more aware of your body and more able to create sensations of physical well-being in your body. Basic body listening skills strengthen your ability to cope with physical *and* psychological health problems. Experiment with the following exercises.

I.

Rest for a few minutes in a favorite “quiet” place. Take several deep breaths and recall *or* fantasize an image of a serene environment. Give yourself time to develop this image with many details, including sounds, smells, colors, etc. Practicing this image on a daily basis will help you learn to create the image and associated sensations of wellness efficiently during highly stressful moments of daily living.

II.

Cultivate playfulness, curiosity, and openness. These mental states are related to well-being. If you are overly serious, controlled, or “closed off,” make behavioral health plans to help you play and explore. For example, you may want to attend a comedy show, rekindle an old hobby, or go for a treasure hunt in a park. A good way to get started with use of these strategies is to watch young children, as most demonstrate these qualities very nicely.

The Fourth Strategy:

Solving Problems

Self-efficacy is a reflection of your confidence in solving the problems you encounter in life. Mastery of problem-solving skills improves your confidence and, hence, your self-efficacy. The following steps are prerequisites for effective problem solving.

- Identifying that something is a problem
- Accepting the possibility that something can be done about it
- Expressing a desire to change
- Being willing to make an effort to change

Use the following problem-solving exercise to review the critical steps in strategic problem-solving and address a current problem in your life.

1. Pinpoint a current problem. Write the problem down here. Define the problem so that it is a problem with a solution.

2. Brainstorm solutions. Generate at least 3 possible solutions.

3. Evaluate potential solutions. Describe advantages and disadvantages of each solution.

4. **Identify the first step** you will take to implement the solution you choose.

5. **Anticipate and plan for obstacles** to your implementing the solution you choose.

6. **DO IT!** Record here when you did it.

7. **Evaluate the results** and continue working toward the solution by simply determining and planning a next step or going through these seven steps again.

Results suggest that:

Next step:

Remember To Celebrate Your Efforts, As Well As Your Successes!

The Fifth Strategy:

Responding to Interpersonal Conflicts

Our patterns of responding to conflict may cost more than we want to pay. If we believe that we must avoid conflict, we may withhold information needed to have healthy relationships. We may passively punish a person who makes a hurtful statement by ceasing to talk to that person. We may sacrifice self-respect to maintain the status quo when we use these strategies to respond to interpersonal conflict.

Alternatively, we may seek power and control over others more directly. We may use verbal and non-verbal expressions to frighten others. When we approach conflict in these ways, we are likely to have few friends and we are vulnerable to a host of physical problems associated with excessive arousal or anger.

If you want to become more skillful in this area, try the following exercises:

1. Acknowledge yourself on a daily basis. You may simply say to yourself, "I allow myself to be," or "I am okay as I am."
2. Whenever you notice tension in your body, ask yourself, "How do I feel right now?"
3. Give yourself a choice about expressing or not expressing feelings and opinions. It is okay to keep your feelings private or share them.

The following exercises are useful if you are currently in a close relationship and want to become more skillful in responding to conflict in this close relationship.

- Try scheduling a "problem solving" meeting. Allow 30 minutes.
- Set the agenda for your meeting. Keep it simple and make it agreeable to both of you.
- Convene your meetings when you are both rested and free from distraction.
- Positively and specifically define the problem you plan to address.
- Use "I" statements (e.g., "I want to have 20 minutes alone everyday" or "I feel upset about being without a job"). These statements help you responsibly express your feelings and make requests without blaming.
- Discuss only one problem at a time.
- Focus on solutions. Avoid trying to be "right."
- Compromise. Select a solution that allows both of you to "win."

- Set a time to “reconvene” and evaluate how your solution is working.

The Sixth Strategy:

Expressing Yourself

There are two important skills involved in the strategy of “expressing yourself.” The first is *personal assertion* and the second is *creative expression*. Both of these skills require “balancing.” Personal assertion requires on-going balancing of respect for yourself with respect for others. Creative expression involves balancing who you are with what you have to work with right now.

Personal assertion skills form the basis of your ability to make direct and honest statements and to stand up for your rights. Development of effective assertion skills may help you improve your mood, your sense of hopefulness, and your energy for enjoying life.

Creative expression is engaging in any activity for the sole purpose of expressing yourself. The possibilities for creative expression are many and change over the course of a lifetime. The loss of an avenue for creative expression may actually provoke symptoms of depression and anxiety. Try the following exercises to strengthen your skills in strategic self-expression.

Creative Expression

List five creative expression activities that you enjoy and that are consistent with your values. Indicate how many hours you have spent in each of these activities in the past week.

Creative Expression Activity	# Hours in Past Week
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

If you had difficulty identifying activities, take time to evaluate your “gifts” or “interests” and available resources or materials in you life at the present moment. If you spent little time in identified activities, consider “scheduling” time for these important activities. Write down your findings here and make a behavioral health plan to engage in creative activities on a *daily* basis.

Gifts: _____

Interests: _____

Resources: _____

The Seventh Strategy:

Balancing Your Thinking

When life is going well, we tend to have two positive thoughts to every negative thought. When we become depressed, the balance changes to two negative thoughts to every positive thought. “Realistic” thinking probably lies somewhere in between.

Shifting the balance in the direction of more positive thoughts is difficult to do, especially without someone to help you. Friends can help when you give them an opportunity and ask for their opinion on something. Knowing how to change the balance of your thoughts is important because it can help you catch yourself when you start to become depressed.

Use the following steps and suggested exercises to help you balance your thoughts.

- Identify a favorite saying or thought that inspires courage or optimism for you in difficult times.
- Try changing your perspective on something of little importance to you from an exaggerated negative perspective to a realistic or slightly positive point of view.
- Identify someone who tends to be a “realist” or “optimist” and contact this person. They can help you balance your thoughts.

Exercises to Help Balance Thinking

Write down favorite sayings and thoughts that inspire courage or optimism.

What positive thoughts do you want to keep in mind right now?

Who helps you balance your thinking on different issues?

Getting Started

Which of the seven strategies discussed in this booklet, if any, do you think will work best for you at present? Place an "X" in the box to indicate the extent to which each of the strategies might help you now. Use a rating scale where:

1 = Not Helpful and 4 = Very Helpful

Strategy	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
Hoping...Planning...Doing				
Building Acceptance and Making Value-Based Choices				
Appreciating Your Mind and Body				
Solving Problems				
Responding to Interpersonal Conflicts				
Expressing Yourself				
Balancing Your Thinking				

Are you ready to start trying the strategies that you think will be most helpful to you?

My level of readiness is:

Not Ready *Unsure* *Ready*

Can you identify friends, relatives or professionals who can help you make a plan to use one or more of the seven strategies suggested in this booklet *and* support you in staying with the plan over the next month? Yes No

Persons who will help and support: _____

Take this booklet with you when you visit your health care provider. She or he will want to look at your responses.

If you want to read more on the use of strategies suggested in this booklet, read the book, ***Living Life Well: New Strategies for Hard Times*** by Patricia Robinson, Ph.D.

Notes:
