

Depression - coping and recovering

Tackling depression as early as possible may mean that you can address problems quickly and avoid symptoms becoming worse. There are various signs to watch out for. Knowing how to manage these signs and where to get support can help you cope with and recover from depression.

Enjoying activities

When you are depressed, you may find that you don't enjoy activities that you once enjoyed as much anymore. You might also find that you think you won't enjoy something but, when you do it, you actually enjoy it more than you expected.

If you don't try activities, you reduce the number of things that may help you cope with your depression. To increase the amount of activities you enjoy:

- List activities you used to enjoy – include as many activities as possible.
- Plan one of these activities each day and try to increase the amount of time available for activities you enjoy.
- After an activity, think about or even write down what you enjoyed about it and talk to others about activities they like.
- Remember that, while you are depressed, you may not enjoy activities as much as before. However, if you keep going, it will help you get better. You will enjoy activities more as you recover.

Developing healthy sleeping patterns

Changes in sleeping patterns are common in people who are experiencing depression. Not sleeping enough or sleeping too much can make you feel worse. Suggestions to help you to establish healthy sleeping patterns include:

- Get up at the same time every morning, regardless of how tired you feel.
- Avoid sleeping during the day or taking a nap before bedtime.
- Have no more than four cups of tea and coffee a day, and don't have either after 4pm.
- Get out of bed and go to another room if you are awake at night. Try to relax – for example by reading, having warm milk, listening to music or doing relaxation exercises.
- Do regular exercise earlier in the day.

Fight your negative thinking

Worrying or thinking negatively is common in people with depression. This affects your ability to focus on getting better and makes you more vulnerable to unhealthy emotions. Tips to help you control worry and reduce negative thinking include:

- Write down what you are worried about. Go through each concern and examine all the possible positive and negative outcomes.
- Think about how realistic your negative thoughts are. Explore alternative thoughts and explanations.
- Avoid talking about negative thoughts and feelings. Try to find realistic thoughts, which will at least balance your negative ones.
- Keep busy and focused on tasks.
- Think about your skills, talents and achievements. Look at the good things around you. Remember happy times.
- Write down your thoughts. Identify negative ones and try to correct them.
- Avoid making major decisions about your life at this time.

Dealing with irritability, agitation and fatigue

People with depression often experience irritability, agitation and fatigue. These feelings can become worse because of changes in sleeping patterns and lifestyle. To help deal with feelings of irritability, agitation and fatigue:

- Tell your friends, family and colleagues what you are going through and that you may appear to be irritable.
- When you are agitated or irritable, stop and think about what is causing you to feel this way and how you can calm down.
- Practise regular relaxation to reduce the impact of irritating or frustrating situations.
- Talk to people who are supportive.
- Be as active as possible, despite fatigue. Schedule activities each day, such as exercise, meeting people, outings or even household chores.

Major depression requires immediate professional help

In some cases, symptoms of depression are strong and persistent. Changes in lifestyle and attitude may have no effect. If this is the case, seek professional help immediately because this is a serious condition.

Immediate medical help may be necessary when symptoms include:

- Significant sleep disturbance
- Loss of appetite
- Unexpected weight loss
- Loss of energy
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Uncharacteristic suicidal thoughts.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 551 800
- SuicideLine Victoria Tel. 1300 651 251 – for counselling, crisis intervention, information and referral (24 hours, 7 days)
- Find a GP near you who specialises in mental health issues through the [beyondblue](#) website
- [beyondblue](#) Info Line Tel. 1300 22 4636
- SANE Mental Health Information Line Tel. 1800 187 263, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm
- National Psychologist Referral Service Tel. 1800 333 497
- Mental Health Foundation Tel. (03) 9427 0407, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

Things to remember

- Tackle depression as early as possible to address problems quickly and avoid symptoms becoming worse.
- There is a range of strategies and supports that can help you cope with and recover from depression.

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