

Getting Active Toolkit

GETTING ACTIVE
IS YOUR BEST
APPROACH TO
MANAGING
DEPRESSION—



Getting active can be the best approach for preventing and managing depression. It means understanding how your activities and your mood are linked and taking steps to get moving.

Noticing what you are doing

The first step in the process is to become aware of the link between your activity and your mood.

This means noticing :

- What you're doing
- Where you are doing it
- Who you are doing it with
- When you are doing it
- What your mood is during certain activities.

Once you begin to pay attention to your behaviours and how they influence your mood you can try new behaviours and notice what happens. Your ability to notice small changes and your willingness to be open to experimenting will help you in this. An attitude of curiosity and willingness to experiment is important.

Rating your mood

Moods (feelings, emotions) are sometimes hard to identify. Especially when we are depressed it can seem like we feel 'bad' all the time or 'worn out' or 'out of control'. It's difficult to identify the specific feeling but it is very important to learn to recognize and name our moods. We can then begin to see the relationship between what we are doing and how we are feeling; and we can experiment with trying new behaviours to see the effect on our mood.

It is also helpful to notice that the intensity of our feelings is not always the same. We might notice that in certain situations we feel a very intense or powerful mood (10/10) whereas in other situations our feelings are much less powerful (2/10). Also notice that moods are usually described in one word. If you find yourself using many words, you are more likely describing thoughts, not feelings.

Rate your mood

Rate your moods with the feeling thermometer



10-very strong
 9
 8
 7
 6
 5
 4
 3
 2
 1-very weak



Sometimes people think from the inside out—That you need to feel good before you get active. But actually the reverse is true. You need to think from the outside in—that you will feel better when you get active.

Here is a list of some common moods you might have during your day.

Mood List

afraid	angry	anxious	ashamed	bored
calm	confused	curious	defeated	depressed
disap- pointed	embarrassed	excited	frustrated	glad
guilty	happy	hurt	insecure	irritated
lonely	loving	proud	resentful	sad
satisfied	worried	Other moods:		

“WE MUST LOOK FOR WAYS TO BE AN ACTIVE FORCE IN OUR OWN LIVES” - LES BROWN



Start with small steps and you will have success.

Getting Active Toolkit

Recording your activity and moods

Make 7 copies of the Daily Activity-Mood Chart. For the next 7 days track your activities and mood on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour basis. If one week seems like too much just pick 2 week days and 2 weekend days. It doesn't have to be exact; but the more detailed you can be in noticing what is happening; the better able you will be to notice changes. It helps if you take a moment to fill in the chart several times during the day – perhaps at lunchtime, dinnertime, and bedtime. Otherwise it can be hard to remember what you were doing or feeling.

Daily Activity—Mood Chart for _____ (Date)

TIME	ACTIVITY	MOOD	RATING 1-10
Midnight			
1:00 AM			
2:00 AM			
3:00 AM			
4:00 AM			
5:00 AM			
6:00 AM			
7:00 AM			
8:00 AM			
9:00 AM			
10:00 AM			
11:00 AM			
Noon			
1:00 PM			
2:00 PM			
3:00 PM			
4:00 PM			
5:00 PM			
6:00 PM			
7:00 PM			
8:00 PM			
9:00 PM			
10:00 PM			
11:00 PM			

Reviewing your Activity—Mood Chart

What do you notice as you look over your Activity-Mood Chart for the past week?

- Many different moods? A great deal of variation?
- Not much variation in mood? Almost always the same mood?
- Situations that were almost always connected with positive mood?
- Situations that were almost always connected with negative mood?
- Times of day when mood was usually positive?
- Times of day when mood was usually negative?
- Situations or times when mood was more intense? Less intense?

Observations from the Activity—Mood Chart on Page 4.

Goals for new activities

Setting goals for yourself is a very helpful strategy to get you moving in the right direction. Now that you know what kinds of activities help you feel good and those that help you feel bad, what kinds of activities can you strive for over the course of the next day, the next few days, or the next week. Don't forget to make these goals realistic. Strive for what you truly can achieve and make sure you are setting yourself up for success. Write down your goals for the next period of time. Don't worry about filling them all in. Just do what works.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____



“IF I HAD NOT BEEN ALREADY BEEN MEDITATING, I WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE HAD TO START. I’VE TREATED MY OWN DEPRESSION FOR MANY YEARS WITH EXERCISE AND MEDITATION, AND I’VE FOUND THAT TO BE A TREMENDOUS HELP”—JUDY COLLINS



“Don't find fault, find a remedy” - Henry Ford

Getting Active Toolkit

“PEOPLE WHO FOLLOW A MEDITERRANEAN-STYLE DIET RICH IN FRUITS, VEGETABLES, WHOLE GRAINS, FISH, AND NUTS, ARE LEAST LIKELY TO BECOME DEPRESSED.”
-DR. SANCHEZ-VILLEGAS AND COLLEAGUES.
(2009)

How does depression affect activity?

When people are depressed they tend to reduce their activities in a number of areas. They might let go of **Self Care**; they withdraw from **Connection with Family and Friends**; they pull back from **Personally Rewarding Activities**; and they avoid **Day-to-day Tasks**.

Looking after ourselves requires attention to basic day-to-day activities of self care such as eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and getting a good night’s sleep. When we are depressed, self care is often neglected. In fact, it is often when these self care behaviours slip that we and those around us begin to recognize that something is wrong.

Your diet

Food is our fuel. It gives us energy and helps us stay healthy. Depression affects appetite and diet differently in different people. Some people overeat when they are depressed, finding themselves drawn to eating as a form of self comfort. ‘Comfort foods’, unfortunately, are often high in fat and carbohydrates (macaroni and cheese, doughnuts, snack foods). It is more common for people with depression to find that they just don’t feel like eating. Their lack of appetite can lead to them ‘forgetting’ to eat.

How has depression affected your diet?

Suggestions:

Even though you might not feel hungry, you need to give your body nutritious food when you are depressed. Here are a few suggestions to help with diet.

1. Choose healthy foods. [The Canada Food Guide](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca) (available on Health Canada’s website www.hc-sc.gc.ca) offers guidelines for healthy food choices and also explains food labelling. Stock up on fruits and vegetables so they are readily available. Try to choose complex carbohydrates (whole grains, brown rice) and steer clear of foods with high levels of refined sugar (pop, candies, cookies).
2. Eat regular meals. This might mean pushing yourself to eat even when you don’t feel hungry. Try to keep a set routine of three meals a day. Eat at the dinner table rather than in bed or lying on the couch.
3. Keep it simple. Meals don’t need to be complicated or time consuming in order to be nutritious.
4. Now is not the time for a restrictive diet. Even if you would like to lose weight, resist the temptation to go without food for long stretches. Maintaining regular, balanced meals, reasonable portions and physical activity is much healthier option.
5. Consider reading the book *Food & Mood* by Elizabeth Somer.



Eating whole foods instead of processed foods is better for you

Exercise

We know that exercise is good for our physical and mental health but it can be very difficult to get up the energy to exercise when we are depressed. Even a walk around the block can feel like a major undertaking. There is growing evidence, however, that regular exercise can play a very important role in lifting mood, increasing energy, and protecting against depressive episodes.

How has depression affected your exercise?

Suggestions:

How do you get yourself exercising when your mood and motivation are low? Here are a few hints.

Find an activity that you enjoy. If you hate jogging, don't set yourself up for failure by choosing it as your activity. What about dancing? – take a class with someone or dance at home to a video. Not into weight lifting? Try yoga. It also builds strength.

1. Keep it simple. Pick an activity that you can easily get to and that doesn't cost too much or require a lot of specialized equipment. If you have to drive an hour to get to the gym you are more likely to talk yourself out of going.
2. Focus more on getting yourself doing the activity, less on following a strict time schedule. Even if you do just 15 minutes of your 30 minute work-out, you will benefit. And you are developing a new pattern of behaviour. Give yourself credit for small steps.
3. Buddy up. Most people find that doing activities with a friend is both fun and motivating. If you've made a commitment to exercise with a friend you are less likely to talk yourself out of doing it.
4. Be patient. It may take time to feel the positive changes.

What's my plan? Write down a couple of things you can do that will get you more exercise?



MANY PEOPLE MAY NOT KNOW THAT EXERCISE DOES MORE FOR YOU THAN JUST HELP YOU LOSE WEIGHT OR BUILD MUSCLE. REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS A PRESCRIPTION FOR HELPING DECREASE STRESS; RELIEVE DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, HEARTBURN AND CONSTIPATION; INCREASE HAPPINESS; IMPROVE YOUR LOVE LIFE AND FITNESS LEVEL; AND PREVENT DIABETES, HEART DISEASE, WEIGHT GAIN, OSTEOPOROSIS AND CANCER.

Getting Active Toolkit



Having a drink at the end of the day may help you unwind but it also may cause you to have poor sleep.

“PEOPLE WITH INSOMNIA ARE KNOWN TO BE AT HIGHER RISK TO DEVELOP DEPRESSION. EVEN A SINGLE NIGHT OF POOR SLEEP CAN AFFECT YOUR MOOD”



Numerous medications can affect your sleep. Talk to your doctor if you are taking medication and you are having troubles sleeping.

Sleep

Sleep problems – not being able to sleep, sleeping too much, or having restless, non-restorative sleep (not feeling rested after sleep) – are a major sign of depression. Depression and sleep difficulties are closely linked and can become a vicious cycle with depression symptoms such as sadness, hopelessness, and worthlessness interfering with sleep and sleep disruption having a negative effect on mood and coping. Sleep problems can also compound depression when people develop a pattern of ‘taking to their bed’, either in an effort to catch up on sleep or as an avoidance of their day-to-day activities and situations.

How has depression affected your sleep?

Suggestions:

Here are some strategies to help you develop a healthy sleep pattern.

1. Prepare yourself for sleep. Give yourself time to settle mentally and physically at the end of your day. In the hour before going to bed avoid activities that get you tense or ‘worked up’ such as strenuous exercise, eating a heavy meal, computer work or games, TV, caffeine (for 6-8 hours before bed), nicotine, and alcohol (other than a moderate amount with dinner). Instead, try dimming the lights, listening to soft music, or taking a warm bath or shower. If your mind is filled with worries or things to do, write a list and put the paper in a drawer. Try shifting your focus to abdominal breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.
2. Prepare your environment. A cool, dark, quiet room is usually better for sleep. Turn off hourly beepers or gongs. You may need to try a sleep mask, ear plugs or using a fan to keep you cooler and/or to mask noise. Turn your clock away so that you can’t see it to avoid clock-watching.
3. Go to bed only when you are very drowsy (yawning, head bobbing), even if this is later than you would like. As your sleep pattern improves, you will get sleepy earlier. If you are not asleep after 15-20 minutes in bed, GET UP. Go out of your bedroom. Do something relaxing like listening to music or reading (but not a captivating 300 page book). Resist eating, drinking alcohol, or smoking. When you begin to feel drowsy, go back to bed. Repeat this as many times as necessary.
4. Set a schedule for getting up. Stick to this even on the weekends or when you’ve had a bad night so that your body develops a regular rhythm of sleep.
5. Avoid napping during the day if possible. If you do nap, limit it to 20 minutes. Talk to your doctor if you are considering use of over-the-counter or prescription sleeping medication.

Substance Use

Alcohol and other drugs are mood altering substances. Alcohol (or other drugs) can make a depressed person feel less tense, more relaxed, less focussed on problems – for the moment. But substance use provides a temporary escape that distracts us from constructive problem-solving and can make our problems much worse.

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant – not what we need when we’re battling depression. Also, alcohol and other drugs interact with prescription medications, including antidepressants. Finally, using substances to cope with depression can become a habit; leading to the dual diagnosis of substance dependence disorder and major depressive disorder.

How has depression affected your use of substances?

How has your use of substances affected your depression?

Although it can be tempting to turn to alcohol or other drugs as an escape when you are depressed, the consequences – both short-term and long-term are negative. Here are some suggestions.

Suggestions:

1. Clear your home of all substances. You don’t need the temptation when you are already dealing with depression. Avoid going to your old drinking/using haunts.
2. Let people know that you are not drinking or using, even if it means making up an excuse. (I’m on antibiotics. I’m the designated driver)
3. Recognize your triggers for drinking/using and make a plan to respond differently.
4. If you tend to drink alcohol when you are upset, try engaging in a more healthy coping strategy. Consider talking to a friend, going for a walk, or doing something you like to do.

Ask for help. Recognize that if you are unable to control your pattern of drinking/drug use you need specialized help. There are services available for people who are struggling with both depression and substance use. Talk to your doctor.



If you are worried that you have developed a drinking problem you could test it out. Try not consuming alcohol for three months. If you have trouble following through you may have developed a habit.

DID YOU KNOW

THAT HEAVY ALCOHOL USE AFFECTS THE BRAIN’S CHEMICAL ACTIVITY INCLUDING THOSE CHEMICALS THAT ARE LINKED TO DEPRESSION?



Winding up in the morning with caffeine and winding down in the evening with alcohol can be habit forming.

SOCIALIZING CAN HAVE A POWERFUL IMPACT ON YOUR MOOD. FOR EXAMPLE, SOCIALIZING WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE IN A BAD MOOD WILL TEND TO INVITE YOU INTO THEIR BAD MOOD. THEREFORE, IF YOU ASSOCIATE WITH ANGRY PEOPLE YOU ARE MORE LIKELY TO FEEL ANGER YOURSELF.

ON THE OTHER HAND, SOCIALIZING WITH HAPPY PEOPLE WILL RUB OFF ON YOU AS WELL AS THEY WILL HELP YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR PROBLEMS IN A MORE HELPFUL WAY. AND THEIR MOOD WILL RUB OFF AS WELL!

Getting Active Toolkit

Connection with Family and Friends

When you are depressed being around people often feels very stressful and can take a lot of energy. It is natural to avoid situations that make you feel stressed, anxious, or uncomfortable. Unfortunately, this avoidance can actually make depression worse. Learning to cope with the difficult emotions and *approach* stressful situations will help you to resist avoidance and build your sense of competency and connectedness.

How has depression affected your connection with family and friends?

Even though it is easier to avoid contact with people when you are depressed, you need the support of friends and loved ones.

Suggestions:

1. Talk to the people who are close to you about what you are going through so that they can better understand and provide you with the support you need at this time. You may choose to only share with a few people. That makes perfect sense.
1. Limit the time and type of your social outings. For example, asking a friend to join you in one of your new activities (taking a dance class) may be more manageable than going away on a camping weekend with 6 people. Sometimes you might have to 'push yourself' to participate in a family or social event but you will likely feel better if you go even for a short time than if you avoid going altogether.
1. Resist the temptation to use alcohol to help you cope with stressful social situations. You don't need the extra stress of trying to hold it together while under the influence or of dealing with a hangover.



Pleasurable Activities

Depression robs people of motivation and energy. Even the things that used to be enjoyable or rewarding become too much work or just not that interesting. And on top of that, it's hard to justify spending time doing 'fun' things if you've fallen behind in tasks at work or home. Another vicious cycle gets going as our avoidance of hobbies, sports, and leisure activities leads to loss of self-confidence.

How has depression affected your involvement in pleasurable activities?



Even though you might not feel as motivated or get the same level of enjoyment from your hobbies or fun activities when you are depressed it is important to schedule some enjoyment into each day to remind you of your own interests and to direct your attention away from negative thoughts and feelings.

Suggestions:

1. Be modest in your expectations. If you are getting back into reading, start with magazines in areas of interest. If you are going to get into knitting again, go for a scarf, not a sweater.
2. Your pleasurable activities can be great rewards for your efforts at increasing other activities such as exercise.

Day-to-day Tasks

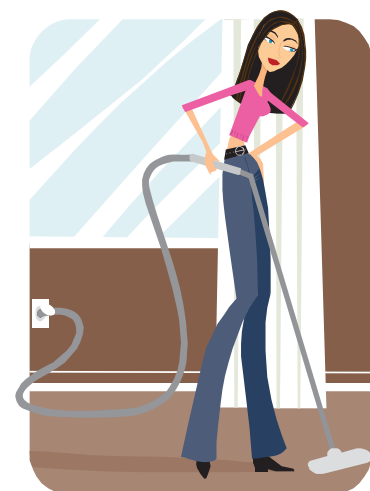
Even small duties like taking out the garbage or opening the mail get neglected when you are depressed. Avoidance of these day-to-day tasks can lead to a pattern of procrastination which adds to feelings of discouragement and inadequacy.

How has depression affected your management of day-to-day tasks?

Procrastination of day-to-day tasks leaves us with an internal feeling of tension and erodes our sense of competency and worth. It also creates tension in our relationships as the people we live with become concerned and frustrated.

Suggestions:

1. Break down your tasks into small steps. For example, if you are taking on the job of cleaning your house, make a list of each small task that is part of the overall job (dust the living room furniture), schedule when you will do each, and reward yourself after each step is accomplished.
2. Stand up to procrastination by reminding yourself that you don't have to enjoy doing the task, you just have to do it. And the best time is now.



Two Experiments

Experiment #1—Identifying new activities

Look back over each of the areas described above, noticing how depression has affected your life in each of these areas. In each of these areas list three possible activities that you would like to **begin** or **increase**.

Diet

Exercise

Sleep

Substance Use

Connection with Family and Friends

Personally Rewarding Activities

Day-to-Day Tasks

Experiment #2

Pick two of the activities that you came up with in **Experiment 1: Identifying New Activities** and write them as goals for the upcoming week. They should be from different areas such as:

Goal #1: I will go for a 15-minute walk 2 times this week.

Goal #2: I will call and arrange to meet either Jennifer or Ryan for coffee once this week.

Schedule these activities into your appointment book at a specific time.

Go for it. You might not feel like doing the activities that you set as goals for the week. That's understandable. But you have made a commitment to yourself and that makes it worth the effort.

Review your progress. If you achieved your goal give yourself credit. If you didn't succeed, what got in the way? Maybe the goal was too ambitious. Scale it back for now. Your energy will increase with time.

After two weeks of working on these 2 goals, review your situation again. Do you want to increase or modify your goals? Do you feel ready to add another goal? If so, pick an activity from another area from **Experiment 2: Identifying New Activities** and write a new goal into your schedule. For example,

Goal #3: I will spend 30 minutes once per week organizing financial papers.

Observe the effect of your new activities on your mood. Look back at your Daily Activity-Mood Chart. Notice differences in your current activities and mood.

Stay with it! Continue with this process. If you complete a goal, such as cleaning the garage, add a new one. Limit yourself to 3-4 goals at a time so you don't get overwhelmed or confused. *Reward yourself every step of the way.*