



Managing Your Mood: Depression

Everyone experiences times when they feel down, pull back from regular activities and feel discouraged about the future. This is part of human experience and may well be an understandable response to a loss or disappointment. If this goes on and on and starts to affect your personal, family and work life you may be experiencing a clinical depression. If this is the case you should seek the services of a mental health or medical professional, particularly if you are feeling hopeless or have thoughts of self-harm. There are a variety of effective psychological and medical treatments that are available.

There are also some things that you can do to help yourself. These can be useful if you are experiencing low mood, or can be used along with help from a counselor or mental health professional if you are depressed. These are based on Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, an approach that focuses on the interaction between thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Some of the key components are:

- **Learning effective problem solving skills.** Sometimes our mood slips because of particular problems, sometimes we feel low without any particular reason that we can identify. Regardless, when we feeling down it is that much more difficult to gather the energy, concentration and enthusiasm to address problems, they can seem overwhelming. By picking a particular problem, identifying possible solutions, picking the best one and acting on it we not only build our confidence, we also solve a problem! This helps us to feel better, one problem at a time.
- **Becoming more active.** When we are feeling low it is common to withdraw from people and the activities that we normally do, they take oomph that we are lacking, and we may expect that we won't enjoy them, or that others will not enjoy us. The net result of this is that we deprive ourselves of those things, which give us the opportunity to feel good, and tend to spend more time feeling badly. Rather than waiting until you feel better, it is important to reengage in your life, either by doing things you used to find enjoyable or by trying something new. It is important to be fair to yourself by setting achievable goals, ideally involving things that are likely to be personally rewarding and/or involve interacting with others.
- **Thinking realistically.** A common feature of feeling down or depressed is seeing the world in a way that is negatively distorted. Indeed, Aaron Beck a prominent clinician, talks about depression as involving a cognitive triad: a negative view of oneself, one's world and one's future. Such patterns of thinking are unrealistic and unfair. They do little to inspire hope or action. In order to deal with this, it is advisable to learn to identify such negative patterns of thinking and how they impact our behavior. Then, learn to challenge the validity and utility of these thoughts. This does not mean naively believing that everything is always great, it means taking a balanced perspective and adopting a style of thinking and interpreting events that is helpful and realistic.



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Like any set of skills, these take practice. They may feel a bit awkward or artificial at first, particularly if they are not a familiar way of doing things or if you have been experiencing low mood for a while. They will get easier and become more automatic with practice. It is worth it.