

Managing Depressive Symptoms BHSU Counseling Center



This packet includes the following:

- ❖ What is depression?
- ❖ Ted Talks for how to get things done when you are depressed, motivation, understanding, and education regarding symptom management.
- ❖ A task organizer to help you prioritize what needs to be completed when going through a depressive episode (Copy as many as you need!) 😊
- ❖ Ideas for coping skills to use when you are feeling low, down, or depressed
- ❖ Tips to improve how you feel
- ❖ Tips to help improve sleep hygiene which is vital for mood balance
- ❖ Suggestions for maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- ❖ Building Happiness Exercises

What is Depression?

Symptoms of a Depressive Episode

depressed mood	loss of interest or pleasure	significant weight change	diminished concentration
sleep difficulties	fatigue nearly every day	feelings of worthlessness	recurring thoughts of death

Symptoms must cause significant distress.

Symptoms must last for at least two weeks.

Demographics

- Women are 2x more likely to develop depression.
- About 1 in 10 people will experience depression during their lifetime.
- Most people experience their first depressive episode between ages 20 and 30.

Risks for Depression

- Family history of depression or similar disorders.
- Poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and other stressful life events.
- Regular drug and alcohol use.

Psychotherapy

(Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

CBT works by changing self-defeating thoughts and behaviors.

CBT has been found to be equally, if not more effective than medicine in many cases.

CBT is the most researched form of psychotherapy for depression.

Medication

(Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)

SSRIs increase the level of serotonin (a chemical related to depression) in the brain.

Studies suggest that SSRIs are the most effective when used to treat severe depression.

SSRIs don't work overnight—it might take up to 6 weeks before they reach their full effect.

A combination of both psychotherapy and medication has been found to be the most effective treatment for depression.

Other Facts

- Over ½ of those diagnosed with depression also suffer from anxiety.
- 60% of those who commit suicide suffer from depression or a related mood disorder.
- Physical exercise has been found to have a significant antidepressant effect.
- Depressive episodes also occur during bipolar disorder alongside manic episodes.

For more resources and information about depression visit:

http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax.cfm?Info_ID=37

**Ted Talks for Motivation, Understanding, and Education
Regarding Symptom Management:**

How to get stuff done when you are depressed | Jessica Gimeno | TEDxPilsenWomen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njESIZa2b10>

The happy secret to better work | Shawn Achor | TEDxBloomington

https://www.ted.com/talks/shawn_achor_the_happy_secret_to_better_work/transcript?language=en

Don't suffer from your depression in silence | Nikki Webber Allen | TED Residency

https://www.ted.com/talks/nikki_webber_allen_don_t_suffer_from_your_depression_in_silence?referrer=playlist-4_ted_talks_on_overcoming_depr#t-110359

PRIORITIZED TASK LIST



HIGH PRIORITY TASKS		DATE DUE
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ADDITIONAL TASKS		DATE DUE
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improving how you feel

People often believe that the feelings and emotions they experience are caused by external events, situations, and the behaviour of others. For example, we might hear ourselves say, "My partner made me so angry," "My boss made me so nervous," "This trip down south made me feel so relaxed," or "I'm depressed because I didn't get the job I wanted." What is the assumption underlying these statements? That someone or something other than ourselves was directly determining the feelings we experienced. However, if we stop to analyse the process that links an external situation to our emotional responses, we will find that there is a step in between.

What Influences My Feelings?

What really makes us feel and respond the way we do, is not the situation or the words and actions of another person, but how we perceive that situation or that person's actions. It is our thoughts and beliefs about an event that significantly influences our feelings and actions.



Here's an example. Suppose you went to a party and your host introduces you to Mike. As you talk to him, you notice that he does not look directly at you but often looks around the room. How would you feel if you thought, "Boy, this guy is so rude! He won't even look at me while I'm talking with him! How nasty!" What if you thought, "Mike must think that I'm really unattractive and uninteresting. I must be a really boring person. Nobody wants to talk to me!" What about if you were to think, "Mike's probably waiting for a friend to come. Maybe he's getting a bit anxious." You probably realised that you felt three different emotions as a result of those three different thoughts. Often, we are not aware of our thoughts and beliefs because they are so automatic and happen quickly. But they are there, and they affect the way we feel.

Why do I feel distressed?

We've talked about the way our thoughts affect how we feel. If we are feeling happy and excited, chances are we have been thinking positive thoughts and about positive things. On the other hand, if we are feeling anxious, depressed, and upset, it is very likely that we have been thinking negative thoughts. We call these unhelpful thoughts (simply because they lead to unpleasant feelings or unhelpful actions!). All of us, at times, think things that make us feel sad or anxious, and that is a normal part of life. However, if you often feel distressed or upset, you might need to examine your thinking in order to improve how you feel.

Feelings are not Thoughts

When we first try to distinguish thoughts from feelings, it can be easy to confuse them. We might be used to talking

remember that feelings are not thoughts. For example, you might hear a person saying "I think I'm anxious," but they're probably *thinking* "Everyone will laugh at me," and *feel* anxious. More commonly, you might hear someone saying something like "I feel that my boyfriend doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," when they are actually *thinking* "My boyfriend doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," and *feel* hurt.

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

What sorts of thoughts are unhelpful? Unhelpful thoughts are those that tend to focus on the negative aspects of a situation, or those that overestimate the chances of a negative event occurring, or those that place unrealistic demands on yourself or others. These are also often known as unhelpful thinking styles because they are patterns of thinking that have become a habit and contribute to a person feeling unhelpful negative feelings.

What Can I Do?

Plenty! There are lots of things you can do to help yourself feel better, and this next suggestion has been proven to be pretty effective. If unhelpful thoughts lead to distressing emotions, then it might be quite reasonable to say that the most effective thing to do would be to change those unhelpful thoughts to helpful ones! Yeah? Okay, so, how can you do that?

First, identify how or what you are feeling. Then, ask yourself "What am I thinking? What conclusions am I making?" to see how and why you are feeling distressed. Remember, unhelpful thoughts will lead to you feeling upsetting emotions.

The next step is to challenge your thinking by exploring other possible explanations and looking at a situation from different points of view. You might ask yourself, "What other ways are there of viewing this situation? How might someone else view this situation? What other explanations could there be?"



The final step is to ask yourself, "How can I revise my original thoughts to take into account these other possible viewpoints?" Then, think of an alternative explanation. This becomes your new, balanced, and helpful thought. A balanced and helpful thought or belief is one that takes into consideration alternative viewpoints and helps you feel better. Replace your original, unhelpful thought with this new, balanced, and helpful belief. Once you have done this, you will probably find that you feel better and your mood will be improved.

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hygiene

What is Sleep Hygiene?

'Sleep hygiene' is the term used to describe good sleep habits. Considerable research has gone into developing a set of guidelines and tips which are designed to enhance good sleeping, and there is much evidence to suggest that these strategies can provide long-term solutions to sleep difficulties.

There are many medications which are used to treat insomnia, but these tend to be only effective in the short-term. Ongoing use of sleeping pills may lead to dependence and interfere with developing good sleep habits independent of medication, thereby prolonging sleep difficulties. Talk to your health professional about what is right for you, but we recommend good sleep hygiene as an important part of treating insomnia, either with other strategies such as medication or cognitive therapy or alone.

Sleep Hygiene Tips

- 1) **Get regular.** One of the best ways to train your body to sleep well is to go to bed and get up at more or less the same time every day, even on weekends and days off! This regular rhythm will make you feel better and will give your body something to work from.
- 2) **Sleep when sleepy.** Only try to sleep when you actually feel tired or sleepy, rather than spending too much time awake in bed.
- 3) **Get up & try again.** If you haven't been able to get to sleep after about 20 minutes or more, get up and do something calming or boring until you feel sleepy, then return to bed and try again. Sit quietly on the couch with the lights off (bright light will tell your brain that it is time to wake up), or read something boring like the phone book. Avoid doing anything that is too stimulating or interesting, as this will wake you up even more.
- 4) **Avoid caffeine & nicotine.** It is best to avoid consuming any caffeine (in coffee, tea, cola drinks, chocolate, and some medications) or nicotine (cigarettes) for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. These substances act as stimulants and interfere with the ability to fall asleep.
- 5) **Avoid alcohol.** It is also best to avoid alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before going to bed. Many people believe that alcohol is relaxing and helps them to get to sleep at first, but it actually interrupts the quality of sleep.
- 6) **Bed is for sleeping.** Try not to use your bed for anything other than sleeping and sex, so that your body comes to associate bed with sleep. If you use bed as a place to watch TV, eat, read, work on your laptop, pay bills, and other things, your body will not learn this connection.



7) **No naps.** It is best to avoid taking naps during the day, to make sure that you are tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, make sure it is for less than an hour and before 3pm.



- 8) **Sleep rituals.** You can develop your own rituals of things to remind your body that it is time to sleep - some people find it useful to do relaxing stretches or breathing exercises for 15 minutes before bed each night, or sit calmly with a cup of caffeine-free tea.
- 9) **Bathtime.** Having a hot bath 1-2 hours before bedtime can be useful, as it will raise your body temperature, causing you to feel sleepy as your body temperature drops again. Research shows that sleepiness is associated with a drop in body temperature.
- 10) **No clock-watching.** Many people who struggle with sleep tend to watch the clock too much. Frequently checking the clock during the night can wake you up (especially if you turn on the light to read the time) and reinforces negative thoughts such as "Oh no, look how late it is, I'll never get to sleep" or "it's so early, I have only slept for 5 hours, this is terrible."
- 11) **Use a sleep diary.** This worksheet can be a useful way of making sure you have the right facts about your sleep, rather than making assumptions. Because a diary involves watching the clock (see point 10) it is a good idea to only use it for two weeks to get an idea of what is going and then perhaps two months down the track to see how you are progressing.
- 12) **Exercise.** Regular exercise is a good idea to help with good sleep, but try not to do strenuous exercise in the 4 hours before bedtime. Morning walks are a great way to start the day feeling refreshed!
- 13) **Eat right.** A healthy, balanced diet will help you to sleep well, but timing is important. Some people find that a very empty stomach at bedtime is distracting, so it can be useful to have a light snack, but a heavy meal soon before bed can also interrupt sleep. Some people recommend a warm glass of milk, which contains tryptophan, which acts as a natural sleep inducer.
- 14) **The right space.** It is very important that your bed and bedroom are quiet and comfortable for sleeping. A cooler room with enough blankets to stay warm is best, and make sure you have curtains or an eyemask to block out early morning light and earplugs if there is noise outside your room.
- 15) **Keep daytime routine the same.** Even if you have a bad night sleep and are tired it is important that you try to keep your daytime activities the same as you had planned. That is, don't avoid activities because you feel tired. This can reinforce the insomnia.



staying healthy

Whatever form of treatment you have been receiving for your difficulties – medication or psychotherapy – it's important that you maintain whatever gains you have made. If you have been seeing a mental health practitioner, keep practising the strategies you might have learned in therapy. This means continuing to apply all the useful skills and insights about yourself you might have gained and they will soon be integrated into your lifestyle.

There are also some other things you can do in order to make the most of what you have learned to stay well or gain that extra improvement. Here are some suggestions:

1. Keep to a balanced routine & lifestyle

A chaotic lifestyle can be stressful in itself. Try to keep to a reasonably structured routine and a balanced lifestyle. This means making sure you maintain good eating, sleeping, and exercising habits, and engage in social activities that can be both fun and challenging.

2. Develop a good social support network

It is wise to find someone with whom you can sit down and have a good talk. This doesn't mean a therapy session where you pour out your heart but rather just a chance to talk through what's going on in your life, what your goals are, and generally just to ventilate with someone you trust. Often, problems seem bigger than they really are when a person tries to deal with them on their own. Hearing yourself talk through something can help to put it into perspective. Socialising is also fun and will help you to keep on track with scheduling of pleasant events.

3. Develop a good professional support network


Professional help is an important resource. Find a doctor or mental health practitioner with whom you can have a good professional relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Talk to them about your needs and concerns. Learn as much as possible about your illness and take an active role in making decisions about treatment and after-care.

4. Expect slip-ups and down days

Slip-ups in progress can happen at any time and are to be expected. Try not to fall into the trap of believing that you are 'back to square one' as this will only make you feel worse. Use your skills of challenging your thinking to help when this situation occurs. It might be useful to remind yourself that most people have 'down days' or days where life's hassles are harder to deal with – its part of being human! Also, you can use setbacks as a way of learning something new about yourself to help avoid similar problems in the future.

Remember – progress may be a bumpy road at times but it will be a rewarding journey on the whole!!!

Use the spaces below to jot down a few things you could do to remain healthy.

Thinking	
Social Activities	Pleasant Activities
	
Exercise	Relaxation
Professional Support	Social Support

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Building Happiness

Promotions, new relationships, and even winning the lottery will give you only a temporary boost in happiness. Each person has a baseline level of happiness that they quickly return to. Sustained happiness takes work. Listed below are exercises that, when practiced frequently, can build genuine and lasting happiness.

Gratitudes: Write down three things for which you are grateful every day. Don't worry if they seem simple or mundane—just get something down on paper. Writing gratitudes will help you identify positive aspects of even the worst days.

Acts of kindness: Make a conscious effort to do something nice for no reason other than to help. You might be surprised how a simple act of kindness can turn around the day for both you and the kindness recipient.

Exercise: The positive effects of exercise are astounding. Physically active people have increased energy, superior immune systems, and a frequent sense of accomplishment. Exercise can reduce insomnia, stimulate brain growth, and even act as an anti-depressant. If jogging or lifting weights seems like too much, don't be afraid to start with a 30 minute walk or a slow bike ride.

Meditation: Research has linked meditation with reduced anxiety and more positive emotions. Those who meditate regularly may even permanently restructure their brains to create sustained happiness.

Positive journaling: Take some time to write about positive events in your life. Write about a fun day spent with friends, a good movie, or an activity you enjoyed. Positive journaling will get you into the habit of focusing on the positive.

Fostering relationships: Strong social connections are thought to be one of the most powerful influences on our mood. Those who are dedicated to spending time with friends and family show the highest levels of happiness. If you can't see your loved ones every day you can still send an email or make a phone call. If it feels like you *never* see your loved ones, schedule time that can be dedicated to them.