

HANDLING DEPRESSION

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How does my depression manifest itself?

When depressed, I experience:

- ❑ a loss of enthusiasm for life.
- ❑ a lack of energy for self-growth.
- ❑ confusion as to what is the meaning of life for me.
- ❑ a blue funk.
- ❑ a lack of excitement or appreciation for my accomplishments in life.
- ❑ lethargy, tiredness, and exhaustion.
- ❑ an inordinate desire to sleep.
- ❑ a flat emotional affect.
- ❑ boredom with my life, job, family, friends.
- ❑ the absence of spontaneity or Joie de vivre.
- ❑ a lack of desire to keep on keeping on.
- ❑ the feeling that the world would be better off if I no longer existed.
- ❑ the desire to run away or end it all.
- ❑ the feeling that I am only an observer of life and not involved in it.
- ❑ a sense of living in slow motion.
- ❑ a feeling of energy and drive during a crises, deadline, or tragedy.
- ❑ tearfulness and weeping for no apparent reason.
- ❑ loneliness, isolation, a lack of being connected to the others in my life.
- ❑ apathy, discontent, and a hollow feeling regarding my day-to-day existence.

What are some causes of my depression?

I feel depressed when I:

- ❑ have a chemical imbalance, physical or biological, needing medical attention.

- ❑ have experienced extended time periods of being shut in the house due to seasonal conditions and lack of appropriate amounts of sunshine and clean air.
- ❑ experience a failure or loss in life.
- ❑ hold in my anger.
- ❑ review my past life and fail to see a meaning or reason for it.
- ❑ have a conflict, disagreement, or fight with those whom I either live or work.
- ❑ feel guilty over something I have done or said.
- ❑ have been criticized or found to be lacking.
- ❑ doubt my ability to be successful.
- ❑ let myself down by not being as perfect or as accomplished as I would like to be.
- ❑ face the futility of the human condition.
- ❑ don't feel approved by someone whose approval I am seeking.
- ❑ experience a major change in my life.
- ❑ have accomplished something that has taken much energy and effort, i.e., the birth of a child, a marriage, a divorce, landing a new job, graduating from school.
- ❑ must deal with death.
- ❑ experience rejection in a relationship.
- ❑ sense that I have no control over the negative experiences in my life.
- ❑ realize that others question my competence, judgment, knowledge, ability, or worth.
- ❑ doubt my decisions, actions, or accomplishments.
- ❑ recognize that I am powerless in the face of addictive or compulsive behavioral problems.
- ❑ am on vacation or have a day off



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- 🧠 experience the 'holidays' (Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, New Year's, Valentine's Day, etc.)
- 🧠 continue to respond with the behavioral role pattern I learned in my dysfunctional family.
- 🧠 am ill or disabled.
- 🧠 hear news that has affected others adversely.
- 🧠 realize that my dreams for the future are unrealistic; fantasies with no possibility of ever being accomplished.
- 🧠 am confused over my direction, goals, or priorities in life.
- 🧠 learn something new about life, something which if I had known earlier would have made my life more pleasant or successful.
- 🧠 continue to not know what 'normal' is, have no idea of 'normal' behavior, or 'healthy' behavior.
- 🧠 am unable to connect with people in healthy relationships.
- 🧠 can't identify the reason for my unhappy, sad, or worried feelings.
- 🧠 ignore my need to express anger in a healthy, productive manner.
- 🧠 feel inadequate.
- 🧠 continue to rely on crises, deadlines, or tragedies to overcome my lethargy and lack of energy.
- 🧠 am jealous of those I perceive to have achieved the 'ideal' life.

What irrational beliefs lead me into depression?

- 🧠 I should not make mistakes.
- 🧠 People should automatically recognize my worth and value.
- 🧠 It is wrong for me to show my anger.
- 🧠 It is a sin to be angry at my parents' behavior toward me.

- 🧠 I should not disagree with others.
- 🧠 People should accept me the way I am.
- 🧠 My loved ones should not leave me; should not die.
- 🧠 I should not get sick or disabled.
- 🧠 What I do should be done perfectly.
- 🧠 I should be rewarded in life for my hard work and sacrifices.
- 🧠 Things should not change.
- 🧠 I should be happy when I am successful.
- 🧠 The 'holiday season' should be the happiest time of my year.
- 🧠 I should be in control over all aspects of my life.
- 🧠 I work best under pressure.
- 🧠 If you want a thing done, give it to a busy person.
- 🧠 I am unable to avoid the crises in my life.
- 🧠 I should be able to solve problems that come my way.
- 🧠 I am only worthwhile if I accomplish something visibly productive daily.
- 🧠 I should not consider my current problems or behavior as a reflection of the way I was reared.
- 🧠 My goals in life should be clear.
- 🧠 I should not be suffering today because of the way I was reared.
- 🧠 Relationships should be established and maintained with ease.
- 🧠 Others should know what I need from them without my having to ask; it's perfectly clear.
- 🧠 I should have been more successful, but others held me back.

What are some negative effects of depression?

When I feel depressed I:

- 🧠 find others unwilling to get involved with me, avoiding me.





- ❑ have self-destructive or suicidal thoughts.
- ❑ escape into unhealthy behavior patterns.
- ❑ withdraw from life, face my problems passively.
- ❑ escape into watching TV, reading, daydreaming or other obsessive but passive behavior.
- ❑ ignore my creativity, imagination, and ingenuity in facing my problems.
- ❑ procrastinate, feeling overwhelmed by my responsibilities, duties, and tasks.
- ❑ turn off my positive emotional response to life.
- ❑ ignore my personal health with poor personal hygiene, no weight control, and lack of proper exercise.
- ❑ get hooked on the need for the adrenalin rush that comes with a crisis, a deadline, or other pressures, even tragedies to get me through life.
- ❑ am anxious, nervous, tense, and uptight for no apparent reason.
- ❑ feel like a loser.

How can I overcome depression?

To overcome depression, I need to:

- ❑ recognize that I am depressed.
- ❑ have a complete physical exam to rule out some other physiological cause for my depression.
- ❑ be willing, under the supervision of an appropriate physician, to use an anti-depressant medication to help me get over the 'hump' of my current bout of depression.
- ❑ determine whether the depression is situational (related to a current situation in my life) or chronic (a long-lasting recurring part of my behavior).
- ❑ identify the causes of my depression.

- ❑ change my irrational thinking and develop a more realistic perspective.
- ❑ accept that anger is the basis for my depression and make a concerted effort to do anger workout sessions daily to lessen its impact.
- ❑ realize that depression is a fact of life, that it accompanies loss, grief, and even success.
- ❑ find a place in my life for relaxation efforts such as self-hypnosis, meditation, and progressive muscle relaxation.
- ❑ use visual imagery to see my life without depression and put my energy into the pursuit of a positive goal.
- ❑ develop a crisis prevention, time management, and catastrophic intervention plan of action.
- ❑ develop a balanced lifestyle with good nutrition, a balanced diet, aerobic exercise, adequate sleep, and stress reduction.
- ❑ work at self-esteem enhancement, self-affirmation, self-reinforcement.
- ❑ commit myself to a specific plan of action to overcome my depression.

What steps can I take to overcome depression?

Step 1: I will review this chapter, then answer the following questions in my journal:

- A. How effectively do I cope with life?
- B. How can I recognize depression in my life?
- C. What symptoms of depression do I currently experience?
- D. What current life situations contribute to my depression?
- E. What explanations clarify my chronic state of depression?





- F. How does my current situational depression exacerbate my chronic depression?
- G. How do I feel about admitting that I am depressed?
- H. What hinders my efforts to overcome my depression?
- I. What feedback do I get from others that alerts me that depression is a problem for me?
- J. How is my depression related to my low self-esteem?

Step 2: Once I have explored the symptoms of depression and admitted that I am depressed, I will attempt to identify the causes. I will answer the following questions in my journal:

- A. How did life in my family of origin result in my current depression?
- B. What losses have I experienced in the last five years to explain my current depression?
- C. What successes or achievements in the past five years have I experienced that might explain this current depression?
- D. What does my family doctor or psychiatrist say about the physical, biological, or chemical contribution to my depression? How do I feel about the need for medication to keep me in chemical balance?
- E. What is my family history of depression? Which relatives had depression or had 'break-downs'? What is my family history of suicide? How do I feel about the concept of having a genetic predisposition to depression?
- F. What are the causes for both chronic and situational depression in my life? (Put these in your journal in separate lists.)

- G. How does my need for excitement in crises, deadlines, pressures, and tragedy relate to my depression?

Step 3: Once I have identified the causes of my chronic and/or situational depression, I need to identify my irrational beliefs that contribute to my depression. I can work to refocus my thinking. To do this I will answer the following questions in my journal:

- A. How rational or realistic is my current thinking?
- B. What beliefs contribute to my current depression?
- C. What is the source of these beliefs?
- D. What is the worst thing that could happen if I no longer holds these beliefs?
- E. What rational beliefs could I substitute to overcome my depression?

Step 4: Once I have begun to rethink and rewrite my irrational beliefs, I need to address the negative effects of depression in my life by answering the following questions in my journal:

- A. What effect does my depression have on my relationships? In my marriage?
- B. My family? My friends? My co-workers?
- C. In what self-destructive behavior do I currently engage?
- D. How withdrawn or passive have I become? How can I become more assertive?
- E. How does escapism defer my personal growth and happiness?
- F. What keeps me from taking control of my time, eliminating procrastination, and facing my depression?
- G. What positive aspects of my life do I seem to ignore?





- H. How does the condition of my body reflect the state of my depression? What positive steps would improve my physical response to depression?
- I. How is my anxiety and tension manifested? How can I reduce its impact on me?
- J. How often do I feel like a loser? At what am I a 'winner'? How much do I work at being a winner? How deeply can I commit to the following belief: To be a winner in life, you only need to be a winner at what you do best and admit that you are a winner.
- K. How committed am I to overcoming my depression?

Step 5: Now that I have reviewed the negative impact of depression in my life, I will record my plan of action to overcome my depression.

Action Plan for Overcoming Depression

I am depressed.

- 1. I have the following forms of depression:
 - a. Chronic depression
 - b. Situational depression
- 2. The causes of my depression are:
 - a. Chronic
 - b. Situational
- 3. The irrational beliefs that contribute to my depression include:
- 4. The new beliefs I need to help lessen my depression include:

- 5. I will work on the following anger to uproot my depression:
 - i. Chronic
 - ii. situational
- 6. I will perform the following anger work-out activities to reduce my depression:
- 7. I will use visual imagery daily in the following ways:
- 8. My plan for a balanced life includes:
 - a. nutrition and diet
 - b. exercise, aerobic, and other
 - c. adequate hours of sleep
 - d. relaxation activities
- 9. My plan for building self-esteem includes:
 - a. self-affirmation
 - b. self-hypnosis
 - c. visual imagery
- 10. I will take the following steps to determine if there is a physical, biological, or chemical basis for my depression:
 - a. appointments with family doctor for complete physical exam
 - b. lab work as needed
 - c. prescriptions as needed
 - d. therapy as needed
- 11. I commit to this plan and will review it monthly.

Step 6: I will lessen my depression using the tools I have been given. I will assess the status of my depression. If it has not improved, I will go back to Step 1 and begin the steps again.

"Self-help works."

