

Top 5 Tips to Help Manage Depression

by

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Do you have difficulty getting out of bed? Have you lost your appetite or perhaps you're eating more than usual? Have others noticed that you're somehow different, somehow not as up or happy as you usually are? Have your coworkers or boss noticed that you have been missing more work lately or coming in late?

If this sounds familiar, you could be suffering from depression. Depression is a word that is often thrown around without much care being given to what it actually means. It seems that if you're sad, then you're depressed. The word depression is sometimes even substituted for sadness. And while sadness is part of depression, that's only part of it.

Depression is a life changing, and at times, life threatening condition. According to the DSM-IV (Diagnostic Statistic Manual-the book therapists use for diagnosis) depression consists of having certain feelings, behaviors, and thoughts. They include, but are not limited to: a depressed mood; loss of interest or pleasure in things you used to like and enjoy; diminished interest in all or almost all activities; significant weight loss when not dieting or, conversely, significant increase in appetite; insomnia; fatigue or loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness or guilt; loss of concentration, and recurrent thoughts of death. These things need to be present all day, everyday or nearly every day in order to be considered clinical depression.

The good news is that depression is treatable. Depression can be managed. It does not have to define you. Most people who suffer from depression are able to live the life they want by taking certain steps that have been proven to work. What I have found in providing therapy is that most people don't take the steps that can help. But if you are willing to do the work you can start to feel better and start to enjoy life again.

Here are 5 tools that have been proven to work for those who suffer from depression. I have seen them work for the people with whom I work and they can work for you.

Think Good Thoughts

This is perhaps the hardest of all the steps you can take. Arguably the worst part of depression is not the sadness, but the negative self-talk and thoughts that you have due to the depression.

The most basic way to manage these thoughts is to confront the negative thoughts and replace them with good thoughts. However, this doesn't mean it's easy. It's not. This is the idea behind one of the most successful forms of therapy for depression - cognitive-behavioral therapy. The idea here is that our thoughts control our emotions and behaviors and if we change our thoughts, we change our feelings and actions, i.e. what we feel, say, and do.

When I work with those who suffer from severe depression changing their thoughts is the hardest thing for them to do. One way I have found that works for people is to acknowledge all the thoughts they have and dismiss the negative ones. The idea is to say to yourself that you are having negative thoughts and then to let them go. It's natural to have negative thoughts when you're feeling depressed. The key is to remember that they are just thoughts and not you. You are separate from your thoughts. You can change the way you think.

Exercise

Research has shown that daily activity helps us to feel better about not only ourselves, but also those around us. The exercise you choose to do doesn't need to be vigorous or long, just something that gets you moving. However, when you're depressed you may find it difficult to motivate yourself to exercise. This is common.

So what should you do? Get up. Go for a walk. Do yoga. Go swimming. Walk up and down the stairs a few times. Do anything that gets you active and your body moving.

Exercise has been proven to create endorphins. Endorphins are chemicals that are released when we are active and they contribute to feeling better. The release of endorphins helps us to feel more relaxed, less depressed, and helps us to have a better outlook on life.

When I work with patients in the hospital I encourage them to pace the halls or ride the stationary bike. The movement and motion helps the body create endorphins and the mind to think about something else. It's another way to help yourself to mental health.

Create a Happiness Journal

It's common to lose track of those things about which you are happy. When I work with people who suffer from chronic depression, I ask when was the last time they were happy or enjoyed doing something. The answer nine times out of ten is that they can't remember. Their brain has blocked the way to think good thoughts and is focusing only on the negative.

One way to combat this is to write down those times when you were happy, when you enjoyed doing something, or when you felt good about yourself. This is important as it will help remind you that there is hope; hope to feel like that again. It will also help remind you that there are events, people, and places you like; things you may have forgotten about.

Eat Well

When you are experiencing depression it's common to either want to eat all day or not at all. And if you choose to eat, chances are that you will want to eat junk food. Why is this? Simply because of the sugar high you will get.

In a study out of Britain, researchers found that people eating whole foods, such as fruits and vegetables, were 26% less likely to be depressed. Conversely, the same study, published in the British Journal of Psychiatry, found that people who eat processed foods, such as those with refined sugars or fast food, were 58% more likely to suffer from depression.

Wanting to eat foods high in sugar, or comfort foods, is normal if you are suffering from depression. But remember, while it's normal, it's not helpful. There

are a number of reasons for this. The first is that sugar only gives us a short boost of energy. It is similar to any drug that lifts our energy and mood for a short time. However, our body will only feel good until it has processed the sugar and then the crash that will happen may even leave you feeling worse than before.

Therapy

And then there's therapy. The simple act of talking about your issues, feelings, thoughts, and ideas can have amazing affects on both your mind and body. Research has shown that talk therapy is among the most important steps someone who is suffering from depression can take.

I have found working with those who suffer from depression that it is common to want to be left alone; to want to hide out in a safe place and just watch the world go by. The problem is that since you are also probably suffering from negative self-esteem, negative self-talk, and feelings of being alone and isolated, what will most likely happen is that you will not be able to make the changes necessary to start to feel better.

However, therapy can help provide a safe place to talk; a safe place to discuss your issues without fear of retaliation, ridicule, or judgment.

Conclusion

There is no one answer on how to deal with depression. My experience in providing therapy has shown me that the act of doing something, anything, creates better results than doing nothing. If you want to start to live a life that has less pain and depression, then now is the time to act. The fact that you're reading this means you have taken the first step in seeking help and that's something you can feel good about.

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