

Coping with Depression

Everyone experiences depressed moods from time to time, as part of life's ups and downs. These moods usually improve in a short time. However, if you feel yourself experiencing symptoms of depression, you can help yourself by using these strategies. If these strategies are not helping you feel better, or you find you don't have the energy to carry them out, seek help from a professional counselor. Don't go it alone!

- Build structure into your day. Make a schedule and set daily goals - and stick to them.
- Include pleasurable activities in each day. Treat yourself to something fun that you look forward to and enjoy.
- Keep physically active. Go for a walk, exercise, clean your room, shoot baskets - you choose what works.
- Get socially active. Be with people. Seek out friends and social activities that help you to feel connected to others and that leave you feeling refreshed and supported. Avoid negative people. Avoid alcohol and other drugs.
- Get enough sleep. Most people need between 6 and 8 hours of sleep a night. Young people in their late teens may need 8 to 10 hours. There's nothing heroic about being short on sleep.
- Eat regular meals of nutritious food. Avoid junk food, which can provide quick energy, but does not sustain us.
- Allow yourself to experience your feelings. Cry, if you need to cry. If you are angry, find a safe way to express your anger. Acknowledge your feelings, and let yourself experience them a little at a time.
- Keep a journal. Write out what you are thinking and feeling. Many people find this a helpful way to get feelings out rather than keeping them inside.
- Challenge negative self-talk. Do not focus on the negative. Stick to what is real and observable, rather than making assumptions or drawing negative conclusions.
- Give yourself positive affirmations. Change negative messages into positive ones that focus on your strengths and gifts, and that are optimistic about the future.
- Develop a support system of positive people. Real friends, family members, a pastor, a counselor, and professors can all contribute to your feeling supported and cared about.
- Give yourself time to feel better. Change doesn't happen overnight.
- Seek help. If depressive symptoms persist, or if you want to talk to an objective, supportive, non-judgmental "third party," contact a professional counselor. It's a sign of wisdom to consult experts for advice and direction.