

Depression

We all experience fluctuations and changes in our mood. Experiencing periods of feeling “down” is a normal process and sometimes a natural reaction and response to circumstances. The distinction between feeling “down” and being depressed is linked to both the degree and duration. Depression frequently impacts our ability to engage with different areas of our life such as work, studies, relationships and social activities. It can also have an impact on our self-esteem.

Depression includes a persistent low mood and loss of interest or pleasure in life. It also commonly involves:

- A change in eating, weight and/or sleep patterns.
- Reduced energy levels and reduced physical activity.
- Impaired concentration.
- Negative thoughts and beliefs about self, others and the world.
- Avoiding other people and withdrawing into your own space.
- Feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness.
- Loss of interest, enthusiasm and enjoyment.
- Reduced sex drive.
- Feeling irritable, short-tempered or tearful.
- Being unable to continue as usual with work and interests because you feel apathetic, “can’t be bothered” or things feel pointless.
- Feeling that the future is bleak or hopeless, feeling that it is just not worth going on or thoughts about suicide.

Why Do We Get Depressed?

Sometimes there is a clear trigger for depression such as an adverse life event. At other times, there is no clear trigger. It may be that a past event resurfaces and has an impact on the here and now.

How Can I Help Myself?

The question at the forefront of your mind may be, “What can I do to help myself?” Where you ultimately want to see change is in how you feel. Here are some ideas that can move you towards that goal.

First, focus some attention on your self-care. What is your sleep routine like? Are you eating regularly and fairly healthily? Are you getting fresh air and exercise at any point in your day and week?

It may also be helpful to think about your day-to-day routine. Try to notice where you are experiencing a sense of enjoyment and achievement and connection to others, even if it isn’t to the extent that you would like it to be. Depression can lead us to withdraw from and avoid things we previously enjoyed. Try to gently work against this impulse, and try to make time to arrange things that open up the possibility of positive emotional experience. Accept that depression is likely to leave you feeling less motivated and less productive, so try to be fair to yourself and acknowledge and celebrate positive changes and achievements.

Depression can leave us feeling battered by an overwhelming volume of negative, automatic thoughts. These thoughts are often very self-critical, judgmental in nature or based on how we feel at that moment rather than in a more objective reality. As an initial step, the more you can increase your awareness of these thoughts—which may have become very familiar and habitual—and start to step back from them and challenge them, the easier it will become to establish new thinking patterns.

Try to focus on:

- Becoming more aware of your negative thoughts.
- Recognizing that your appraisal of situations may be biased or distorted due to depression.
- Learning how to challenge your own negative thoughts and beliefs so that they become more balanced.

Here are some examples:

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Negative Thought</i>	<i>Other Explanation</i>
I received critical feedback on an essay.	I am stupid.	I didn't have much time to do this essay—the workload has been very heavy recently. I chose to do other things as well. The work is supposed to be challenging. Constructive criticism helps me to improve. I've done OK in the past which shows I can do well.
My partner does not want to see me tonight.	They don't care about me anymore.	They said they had work tonight—this is most likely true. We saw each other on the weekend and had a good time. They've said some nice things to me lately and seemed caring the last time we met.

Do not automatically believe your negative thoughts no matter how powerful they feel at the time. Remember, a thought is just a thought—it's not a fact; it's an opinion. By considering other explanations, your "worst possible" conclusion will be seen as only one of a number of possible explanations for your situation. This allows you to consider each explanation and see which is most likely or to collect "evidence" which will help you test the different explanations. If you feel it is appropriate, try talking to other people to help get a balanced perspective on what are the most likely explanations.

Seeking Further Help

Seek help if:

- Your low mood and negative thoughts persist or are so strong that you feel powerless to do anything about them.
- Your low mood is interfering with your life, work or relationships.
- You experience feelings of hopelessness or feel suicidal.

Where to Seek Help

- Call to make an appointment with or visit with a counselor at the Kelly Center.
- Visit with your medical doctor or the Student Health Center for information on a range of treatments available to you including medication.
- If you feel that you need urgent support out of normal working hours, go to the Emergency Room at the hospital or call 911.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255