

Surviving Depression

If you have been diagnosed with major depressive disorder, you are probably not very hopeful that things will get better. After all, feeling down and hopeless is a symptom of depression. Because of how strongly it affects your thinking, emotions, and your sense of self, major depressive disorder can be difficult to recover from on your own.

Remember that depression hijacks your thinking. If you have a thought, "I am a terrible person," that is the depression talking. Things may even seem so bad at times that you have thoughts that you do not want to go on living. It's normal to have that thought, because things seem so bad to your mind, but once again, that is the depression talking. If the thoughts are frequent and strong, talk to a professional right away, or go to your nearest emergency room. If you live in the United States, you can call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

The good news is that there are now a number of well-researched, effective treatments for depression. Talk to a professional about which options might work best for you.

First of all, make sure you are receiving good medical care. Symptoms of depression can be caused by, or made worse by, your body and brain chemistry, such as thyroid and vitamin D levels. Sometimes medications have side effects that mimic depression, and some medical diseases contribute to depressive symptoms.

Also, take an honest look at any substances that might contribute to your depression. Alcohol and tranquilizers can make depression worse, and caffeine or energy drinks can contribute to feelings of anxiety.

Some people find antidepressant medication helpful, and recent studies have shown that taking Omega-3 can be effective. Some people use light therapy, in which they expose themselves to bright light to stimulate the brain. In some serious cases, doctors may recommend electrical or magnetic stimulation of the brain.

Psychotherapy, or talking with a professional psychologist, counselor, or social worker, has been proven beneficial, and can also teach you skills for preventing future issues. There are different types of psychotherapy, and most of them have been shown to be equally effective, so you may be able to choose the approach that best suits you by first asking potential therapists about what they do.

The most important thing in recovering from clinical depression is called "behavioral activation." **That's just a fancy way of saying, "get moving."** It does not matter much if you intellectually understand why you are depressed, or what is keeping you depressed. Normally, we wait for our thoughts and emotions to tell us when we "feel like" doing something. With depression, we need to do the opposite. When you are depressed, you cannot trust your thoughts and feelings, so don't

listen to them. You also don't need to fight with them, or argue with yourself. Just notice the thoughts and feelings, and get moving.

The scientific benefits of exercise on depression and general mental health have been known for decades, but at the very least, do the following:

- Get out of bed or off the couch
- Take a walk around the block
- Go out to the store or to a park
- Do things with friends or family members
- Engage in a hobby that you used to enjoy

Your brain will tell you that it won't make a difference. You will probably not feel like doing those things, because depression robs you of your ability to feel pleasure. You probably won't even feel better after you do the activity, but do it anyway, and the feelings will catch up later.

In the spaces below, write down a plan to help you survive this episode of depression. Answer the following questions:

What activities can you do, however small, to get yourself moving and active?

What hobbies can you do, even if you don't enjoy them at first?

What professionals, friends, and family members can support you through this?

How can you take care of yourself during this difficult period?



Because your mind is not in a good place right now, make sure you seek help in creating and enacting your plan.