

## **A Holistic Approach To Managing Depression**

A holistic approach to managing depression that integrates mind, body, purpose and connection to address the whole person through a combination of self-care strategies and, when needed, professional support. These practices address key areas for wellbeing and are complementary to medical treatment.

### **The Cycle of Depression**

Low mood → less activity → lost motivation → feeling worse → even lower mood  
Breaking it often means doing small things that interrupt that loop, not fixing everything, just gentle shifts.

### **Mind**

Mental health involves managing stress, developing healthy thinking, stimulating your brain, processing your feelings and cultivating self-awareness.

#### Practice Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness is the practice of purposely focusing attention on the present moment with a non-judgmental and accepting attitude. It reduces stress, anxiety and rumination by encouraging awareness rather than reactivity to daily life. Meditation calms the mind and reduces stress, anxiety and depression.

#### Challenge Negative Thoughts

The way you think, feel and behave are linked. Identify and reframe unhelpful thought patterns that contribute to feelings of depression.

#### Engage in Creative or Learning Activities

Stimulate your brain by learning a new skill, trying a new hobby or taking on a project. Creative outlets like writing, painting or making music can help you express emotions in a safe way.

#### Set Achievable Goals

Break down larger goals into smaller manageable tasks to create a sense of accomplishment and purpose.

#### Journaling

Writing about your thoughts and feelings can help you process them and track your mood over time. This will also cultivate self-awareness.

### **Body**

The mind and body are connected. Physical health has a direct and significant impact on your mental health.

#### Get Regular Physical Activity

Exercise releases feel-good chemicals (endorphins) that improve your mood, reduce stress and boost self-esteem. Even gentle activity, such as walking for 20 minutes a day, can make a difference.

#### Eat a Balanced Diet

A healthy diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein supports brain function and helps you to feel good. Consider a Mediterranean-style diet which has been linked to lower rates of depression.

#### Prioritise Sleep Hygiene

Aim for 7 to 9 hours of quality sleep per night. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine and avoid screens (phones, tablets, etc.) before bed to improve sleep quality.

#### Avoid Drugs and Alcohol

While you might be tempted to use substances to cope, they make depression symptoms worse in the long run.

#### Attend to Personal Care

Simple daily tasks like showering, brushing your teeth and getting dressed can make a big difference in how you feel.

### **Purpose and Connection**

#### Purpose and Meaning

Having a sense of purpose and meaning is essential for mental health. This provides resilience against stress and reduces risks of anxiety and depression. It acts as a protective long-term health driver and provides daily motivation. Cultivating it involves connecting with your passions, interests and goals that will bring you satisfaction, fulfilment and joy.

#### Connect with Others

Strong social connections provide emotional support and a sense of belonging. Reach out to trusted friends or family, connect with people who have similar interests, join a club or volunteer in your community.

#### Spend Time in Nature

Being outdoors can boost your mental well-being and reduce feelings of stress. Even bringing nature indoors with plants or listening to natural sounds can help.

#### Practice Gratitude and Kindness

Taking time each day to reflect on things you are grateful for shifts your focus from negative thoughts. Small acts of kindness towards others will also create positive feelings.

#### Explore Spirituality

This does not necessarily mean organised religion. It can be anything that helps you develop a deeper sense of meaning, purpose or connection. Practices like prayer, meditation or quiet contemplation can help you find inner peace.

### **What do I need today?**

Every day, ask yourself: what do I need today that will nurture my mind, body or soul? What are my needs for today?

### **Professional Help**

#### Talk to a Doctor

Consult your GP to understand your depression and explore treatment options, including therapy or medication if needed.

### Consider Therapy

CBT helps to challenge negative thought patterns. Psychodynamic therapy explores past experiences and their link to current feelings. Person-centred therapy helps to develop self-esteem, personal identity and resilience. Integrative therapy will tailor therapy for individual needs.

### **Key Principle**

Start small & be kind to yourself. Break tasks into tiny steps. Don't get discouraged if you miss a day; just restart, even if it's a smaller version.

### **The Butterfly Effect**

Small changes can produce large-scale impact. Small steps can produce significant benefits for your mental health.

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