

How to manage the symptoms of depression

At a glance

- It can take time to recover from depression, so be patient, stick with your treatment and take it one day at a time.
- A few changes to your lifestyle and mindset can help you to manage the symptoms of depression – and learn to keep it at bay.
- Keep fit and healthy, build a circle of good friends to support you and learn some simple relaxation techniques.

How to manage the symptoms of depression

For some people, recurring bouts of depression can be a lifelong challenge. And while medication and counselling may ease symptoms, some key lifestyle changes can help you manage the condition long term. In this fact sheet, you'll find out how a few simple changes to your lifestyle can help you keep depression at bay.

The importance of support and relaxation

Isolation and depression often go hand in hand. So, strengthen your relationships with other people. Surround yourself with people who understand that you may need help to keep your mood up sometimes. When you're not feeling well, make an effort to expand your inner circle.

Talk to colleagues or neighbours. A few close friends can help you through difficult times and support your efforts to stay healthy.

Too much stress, or poor coping tactics, can trigger depressive episodes. So, try to learn and practise some relaxation techniques. Deep-breathing exercises might be enough to help you through a stressful period. Other forms of relaxation that can help are:

- Meditation classes
- Massage therapy
- Tai chi
- Yoga
- Gentle stretching or walking

Keep fit and healthy

Some studies suggest that our level of fitness can affect our mood. And in some cases, a bad diet and lack of exercise can make depression worse. If you're feeling bad, just a small amount of exercise can help to boost your endorphin levels – the brain chemicals that make you feel happy. (If you haven't been physically active for some time, it's a good idea to check with your doctor before you start to exercise.)

As well as getting some gentle exercise, there are a number of things that you can do to stay healthy and feel good:

- Get a good night's rest every evening
- Reduce or eliminate alcohol
- Stop smoking
- Eat a balanced diet
- Stay hydrated
- Get some sunlight every day
- Limit your caffeine intake
- Do something you enjoy

Stick with your treatment and take life day by day

Treatment for depression is often subtle and cumulative. Your doctor may prescribe antidepressants, counselling or a combination of the two. It may take a while to feel the benefits of treatment, so be patient. And if you are prescribed medication, don't stop taking it without talking to your doctor first – even if you suddenly feel better – as it may make your symptoms worse.

If you do start to feel worse, or are worried that you may hurt yourself or someone else, call your doctor straight away. If you feel that too long has passed without any results, speak to your doctor too. Not every antidepressant works for every person, and they may decide to change your prescription or dosage. Remember that they're working with you as a team to help you to feel better, so always keep them informed.

Whether you're having a good or a bad day, try to go easy on yourself. Depression is more than just a bad mood – it's a physical illness that can take a while to cure. Some days may be brighter than others, but things will get better. And even if your symptoms are easing, you still may have bad days – everyone does. So, just take each day one at a time and focus on your treatment and staying healthy. In time, your mood will start to lift more consistently and you'll find something to enjoy every day of the week.



Critical support when you need it

Visit optumwellbeing.com/criticalsupportcenter for additional critical support resources and information.



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