

Taking Control of Your Mood



Transcript and workbook

Introduction

Everyone experiences sadness from time to time. But when that sadness becomes so severe and persistent that it impairs your ability to get through the day, it requires serious attention because it may signal the onset of depression. Regardless of your experience, it is important to know the signs and symptoms that are associated with depression. Although no single symptom is diagnostic of depression, a certain number and pattern of these symptoms may indicate the onset of a depressive disorder or a form of depression that is mild. All of the following symptoms should be taken seriously and all can be treated. The good news is that a lot of things will help relieve these symptoms. But you first have to honestly identify them within yourself. Then, see your health care provider.

Depression can appear as changes in your mood:

- Depressed mood with overwhelming feelings of sadness and grief *
- Losing interest in things you usually enjoy *
- Feeling sad, blue, or down in the dumps (which does not change with circumstances) *
- Loss of motivation (i.e. you don't "feel like" doing anything)
- Not getting pleasure from things that used to please you
- Awful, sad, discouraged feelings
- Feeling slowed down, restless, or unable to sit still

Depression can appear as changes in your body:

- Headaches
- Aches and pains
- Digestive problems
- Sexual problems
- Appetite (loss or gain) or weight (loss or gain)
- Feeling profoundly tired all the time

Depression can appear as changes in your thinking:

- Pessimism, hopelessness, worthlessness *
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide *
- Indecisiveness
- Seeing only faults in yourself
- Low self-esteem or self-confidence
- Poor judgment
- Inability to tolerate pressure
- Trouble concentrating or remembering or learning new information

And depression can appear as changes in your behavior:

- Increased smoking
- Increased use of drugs and alcohol
- Crying often or being beyond tears
- Trouble falling asleep, frequently waking in the night, waking unusually early, or oversleeping
- Eating too little or too much
- Avoiding other people
- Being argumentative or abusive
- Unusually poor hygiene

Do you recognize any of these signs or symptoms in yourself? Although no single sign or symptom from the previous list is diagnostic of depression, a certain number and pattern of these symptoms may indicate the onset of a depressive disorder or a form of depression that is mild.

Be certain that you speak with your health care provider about your experience if you:

- Are experiencing any of the symptoms, particularly those marked with an asterisk, continuously for more than two weeks, or
- If you have thoughts of self-harm or suicide, or
- If these symptoms are interfering with your work, social life, or family obligations.

All of these symptoms should be taken seriously. All of these symptoms can be treated.

What causes depression?

Nobody is completely certain what causes depression but there are two well researched and supported ideas. One is medical and the other is psychological. The medical model of depression suggests that it is caused by improper functioning of your brain chemistry. And so medical treatments, like antidepressant medication, help change your brain chemistry and return it back to normal. When this happens, you begin to feel better.

Another model, the psychological one, suggests that depression is a result of things you say to yourself and your behavior. For example, depression occurs when you become overly negative, self-critical or pessimistic about yourself, your experiences, and your future. Saying things like:

- "I am worthless"
- "Nothing ever goes right for me", and
- "Things will never get better"

As well, depression occurs or is made worse when you stop doing things you normally enjoy and withdraw from your social life or your work or your family. Regardless of the source of depression and sad mood, you can definitely take steps to feel better and experience more happiness in life. Sometimes this involves lifestyle changes, or changing your thinking, or seeking professional help such as medication or therapy.

Improve your mood

In this module, you will learn six ways to help you improve your mood. Just as the symptoms of low mood appear in four parts of your life (body, behavior, feelings, and thinking) the strategies to improve mood also fall into those same areas. They are:

- Take care of your body (eat well, develop good sleep habits)
- Change your behavior (get active)
- Change your feelings (become action-centered, reduce tension)
- Change your thinking (think optimistically)

Strategy 1: Eat well

One of the basics of self-care is to eat well. Fueling your body with proper nutrients is important because your body's physical state can influence your mood, stress level, and health. Thus, always strive to eat a good, balanced diet.

Be sure that your daily food choices include:

- Grain products. For example, whole grain cereal or bread, barley or brown rice, bran flour in muffins, pasta.
- Vegetables and fruit. Particularly the dark green and orange varieties like broccoli, carrots, and oranges.
- Milk and milk products. For example, yogurt, cottage cheese, puddings.
- Meat and lean protein alternatives. For example, chicken, fish, lentils, eggs, peanut butter, tofu.
- Few added fats. For example, use low-fat versions of salad dressing, low-fat condiments such as mustard and salsa rather than mayonnaise.

Try these quick tips

- For an energizing meal or snack, try cereal with skim milk or a bagel with non-fat cream cheese, chicken, turkey, or tuna.
- For a calming meal or snack, eat crackers, a baked potato, dried fruit, whole-grain bread, pretzels, rice cakes, or air-popped popcorn.
- Don't skip breakfast. Your body needs the energy in the morning and you might overeat at lunch.
- Avoid sugary breakfasts (e.g., a donut) which can cause your mood to slump later that morning.
- Keep alert in the afternoon by eating a small low-fat lunch rich in protein like chicken breast, tuna, yogurt or a green salad with fresh fruit.
- To wind down at the end of the day, choose pasta, rice, or potatoes with your dinner plus a salad.



Strategy 2: Develop good sleep habits

Good sleep habits lead to better sleep. This, in turn, improves mood, reduces stress and tension, and leaves you feel more energetic and refreshed.

Everyone has different sleep requirements, so use your own internal wisdom about how much sleep is right for you. However, good sleep habits are important for everyone. Try these tips.

- Do something relaxing, like reading a book or taking a warm bath before going to bed.
- Avoid caffeine-containing foods (e.g. chocolate) and beverages (e.g. coffee, tea, and soft drinks, especially colas) at least 4 hours before bedtime.
- If you are not asleep approximately 1/2 hour after lying down, get up and read or do something relaxing until you feel drowsy. Then, go back to bed.
- Never use your bed for activities other than sleeping and intimacy. For example, don't lie in bed eating while watching television. Keep the bed a place for rest.
- Avoid alcohol in the evening. Even a small amount of alcohol (e.g. a glass of sherry) can later awaken you, and larger amounts of alcohol will interfere with the quality of your sleep.
- Try the relaxation techniques from the "reduce tension" section of this course, while lying in bed. For example, try visualizing a peaceful, calm scene.

If you still have trouble falling asleep, see your physician. Sometimes this sleeplessness is a sign of depression and will be helped when the depression is treated, and sometimes the physician may prescribe a brief period of sleep-aid medication (note: any medication to aid sleeping should only be used for a few days, not on a regular basis).



Strategy 3: Manage your feelings

When feeling distressed or upset, we sometimes let our emotions and feelings determine our behavior. In other words, we let our feelings (anger, sadness, guilt, despair, anxiety, etc.) dictate or determine our behavior (the things we do, the actions we take). For example “I feel so stressed that I need to overeat” or “I’m so angry I’m going to yell.”

When feelings determine behavior, you are living your life by your emotion. You are ‘emotion-centered.’

Rather than let feelings determine behavior, try becoming more ‘action-centered.’ In other words, focus on what you need to do in a situation despite any temporary feeling(s) you may have.

Action-centered living means that you acknowledge your feelings and learn from them (e.g. “why am I feeling this way?,” “what does my emotion tell me about my situation and what I need to do?”). Once you know why you are feeling a certain way, you then decide upon the best action to take in that situation--what would help resolve the feeling or contribute in a positive way to the situation.

For example, if you are angry, don’t yell (emotion-centered). Instead, take a breath, relax for a moment, and then calmly try to resolve the situation (action-centered).

Or, if you are anxious, don’t avoid the situation (emotion-centered). Instead, think about why you are feeling anxious (e.g. “I am worried that I will not do a good job”) and take steps to prepare yourself or do whatever is most helpful in that situation.

Or, if your mood is low, don’t withdraw from life. Instead, say to yourself “I don’t feel like doing anything right now, but, despite that, I’m going to go outside and walk for 15 minutes”).

The three steps to becoming ‘action-centered’ are:

Step 1: Identify the situation where your troubling feelings emerge.

Step 2: Learn from those feelings.

Step 3: Take constructive action.

Step 1: Identify the ‘emotion-centered’ situation

First, identify a situation in which your feelings determine your actions.

Using the space below, describe a situation that occurred in the past week where you felt a strong emotion (a situation where you felt stressed and reacted a certain way because of those feelings).

Consider: Who was involved? What did you do? What were the circumstances?

Example 1: “Last week, I was so angry at my husband after he stayed out late drinking with his friends that I yelled at him.”

Example 2: “I heard someone criticize my work and it made me very unhappy. I stopped what I was doing and just sat there for the rest of the afternoon without actually doing anything.”

Step 2: Describe your feelings in that situation

The next step is to describe your feelings in that situation. What were you feeling? What were you thinking? What did you fear might happen? What were you experiencing? Use the space below.

Example 1: "I was feeling very angry. I felt as if I was being neglected because my husband didn't phone me let me know he would be out with his friends. I felt as if I came second in his life."

Example 2: "I was feeling worthless. I felt as if the work I was doing was of poor quality and that I might as well stop doing it altogether."

Step 3: Describe what you would do differently if you did not feel the same way

The next step is to describe the action you would have taken if you were in that same situation but not feeling the same way. Imagine what you would do if you were completely calm and free of any negative or unwanted feelings.

Example 1: "If I wasn't feeling neglected, and angry, I wouldn't have yelled at him when he got home. Instead, I would have told him that I would like him to call first. I might also have talked about how I really want to feel like I come first in his life and that sometimes it doesn't seem that way."

Example 2: "If I wasn't feeling worthless, I would have continued doing my work the way I usually do...I certainly wouldn't have sat there wasting time and feeling sorry for myself."

Use the space below to describe what you would have done differently in that same situation if you were not experiencing the unwanted or uncomfortable feeling(s).

Step 4: Learn from feelings

What can you learn from your feelings? What does your feeling or experience in that situation say about you? What is the message that your feeling(s) were (or are) giving you? What does this say about you? About your situation? About what you need to do differently?

Example 1: "I'm learning that I need a lot of reassurance and that I'm not really angry at him. I'm also learning that he really does love me but he doesn't always know how I feel. Maybe I can work on my need for reassurance and maybe, together, we can work out something that will help us communicate better."

Example 2: "I'm learning that I need to be less sensitive to what other people think and instead trust my own judgement. I'm learning that I take one person's opinion and allow that to ruin my mood. I can think of other people who like me for who I am."

Think about the questions and use the space below to record your answer and thoughts.

Step 5: Take constructive action

Now that you have identified how you could have behaved differently and now that you have decided what you can learn from your feeling(s) in that situation, ask yourself: "How can I act differently if that same situation arises again?"

Example 1: "If this happens again, I'm going to ask myself whether or not I'm really angry at him because I need reassurance, or because he is being truly inconsiderate. And I'm not going to yell at him about drinking with his friends because that's not really the issue. I'm also going to ask him to let me know if he's going to be staying out late, so I can plan my time, too, and we can both have a good time."

Example 2: "If this happens again, I'm going to ask myself if I'm exaggerating one person's opinion and whether or not that opinion is worth getting upset about. And I'm going to remind myself that I do good work."

Step 6: Identify any obstacles

What might interfere with acting differently in that situation if it arises again, or if you feel that same way again (e.g. motivation, forgetfulness, unsure how to behave differently)? Describe your potential obstacles in the space below and how you will deal with them if they arise.

For example: "My biggest obstacle is that my feelings will overcome me. If I feel that this is happening, I will take a few deep breaths to clear my mind and decide what I should be doing."

Step 7: Track your progress

Successful change requires that you track your progress so that you know when you are being successful at changing your thinking. How will you keep track of your progress? Write the details of what you can do below.

For example: keep a journal or daily diary, write down your accomplishments every time they happen (e.g. whenever you do something constructive and helpful in a situation rather than act upon your temporary feeling), post a "calendar of success" on your refrigerator, etc.

Step 8: Reward yourself

Finally, a good action plan includes a reward to celebrate your success. How will you reward your progress? How often will you reward yourself?

For example: "The next time I do something positive and constructive, rather than act on the whim of how I feel, I will buy myself a fun magazine to read" or "at the end of each week I'll reward myself by attending a movie with a friend."

Strategy 4: Think optimistically

What is going through your mind when you are experiencing distress, feeling down, or upset. Are you saying to yourself “This is awful, I don’t deserve this”, “I’m never going to get through this”, “I can’t stand this anymore”?

These thoughts (i.e. the things you are saying to yourself) have a powerful influence over your mood and your behavior. Specifically, your own thoughts can make you feel frustrated, distraught, anxious, or powerless, and they can lead you to withdraw, stop trying to change, etc. However, in similar fashion, your thoughts can improve your mood, fuel your confidence, and propel you to take positive, constructive action.

So it’s important to change negative, unreasonable, and/or inaccurate thoughts into positive, optimistic, and accurate ones.

Negative thoughts:

1. Foretell failure, suffering, or disappointment (e.g. ‘things will only get worse’).
2. Negatively evaluate a thing or another person (e.g. ‘he is an idiot’).
3. Generalize about things (e.g. ‘I am a failure’ or ‘I can’t escape my past’).

Positive thoughts:

1. Are optimistic (e.g. ‘I am going to succeed’, ‘things will turn out okay’).
2. Positively evaluate a thing or another person (e.g. ‘that’s a great idea’).
3. Are realistic (e.g. ‘I can cope with this, even if I make a mistake’).

Begin by clearing your mind

The first step towards changing your thinking is to pause for a moment and calm yourself. This will help clear your mind of negative thoughts and leave you open to other ways of thinking and being more reasonable about the situation you are in. Try the following:

Lie on the floor, or sit comfortably in a chair

Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing

Breathe slowly and fully through your nose to a very slow count such as this:

Breathe in and hold....one...two...three....and breathe out....one...two....three

Be sure that you breathe deeply enough that you expand your abdomen fully

Each time you breathe in, pause for a moment when your lungs are full and then slowly exhale through your lips...

Again, to a slow count of one...two...three

As you exhale try to focus on moving lower back pressing towards the floor or into the back of your chair

Be sure that you expel all of the air from the bottom of your lungs...

And repeat this five or six times...each time inhaling slowly and fully and exhaling slowly and fully

To aid in clearing you mind, try visualizing a pleasant scene (e.g. a tropical beach or a balloon floating upwards into the sky).

Now that your mind is clear, try the action plan that follows.

Change your thinking: Action plan

Step 1: Check your thinking

Check whether your thoughts are reasonable and positive. Ask yourself questions like these:

- Is what I am thinking 100% true?
- Have I ever experienced something that proves what I am thinking is not true?
- Am I being reasonable?
- Am I blaming myself for something over which I have no control?
- Am I jumping to conclusions?
- What am I afraid might happen?
- What do you conclude about your thinking?

Step 2: Replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts

To replace negative thoughts with positive, optimistic, and hopeful thoughts, ask yourself questions like these:

- What would I tell my best friend if they were thinking this way?
- What is a more positive, realistic way of thinking about this situation?
- What can I begin to tell myself that will help me feel better?
- When I coped well with something like this in the past, what did I tell myself then?

What do you conclude? Write a more positive, optimistic, hopeful thought for yourself in the space below.

Step 3: Get some perspective

If you have trouble changing your own thinking, try getting some perspective on it. Try to step back from your own point of view and see if you can think of other possible ways to look at the situation you are in. Try any of the following:

A. Talk to a supportive friend

Tell them what you are experiencing and thinking.

- What do they say?
- What is their reaction?
- Do they say things that contradict your thoughts?

B. Find someone who is in a similar situation and who is coping well

Ask them what they are saying to themselves to help them cope.

C. Write your thoughts down

Write your thoughts down on a piece of paper (e.g. a journal or diary). This helps you release the tension associated with your thoughts and see them more objectively. Look at what you've written and see if you can find something to change about it.

Step 4: Put new thinking into action

Once you have identified your negative, stressful thinking and come up with new ways of thinking, you need to put these new thoughts into practice in your life.

Create a positive, realistic, optimistic statement that you can tell yourself.

For example: "The next time I start to feel distraught about my situation I will tell myself ".I am going to be okay. I will rise above this.."

Step 5: Identify obstacles

What might interfere with using your new, positive thoughts (e.g. motivation, forgetfulness, unsure how to be positive)? Describe your potential obstacles in the space below and how you will deal with them if they arise.

For example: "My biggest obstacle is that I will forget to use my positive self-talk. So I will plan to use my positive self-talk beforehand."

Step 6: Track your progress

Successful change requires that you track your progress so that you know when you are being successful at changing your thinking. How will you keep track of your progress?

Write the details of what you can do below.

For example: keep a journal or daily diary, write down your positive thoughts every time you use them, post a "calendar of success" on your refrigerator, etc.

Step 7: Reward yourself

Finally, a good action plan includes a reward to celebrate your success. How will you reward your progress? How often will you reward yourself?

For example: "The next time I remember to use positive thoughts, I will buy myself a fun magazine to read" or "at the end of each week I'll reward myself by attending a movie with a friend."

Strategy 5: Get active

This may surprise you, but a proven research finding is that one of the most effective ways to improve your health and alleviate stress, worry, sadness, and even anger, is through regular activity and exercise.

Just about any kind of activity or exercise is helpful (e.g. walking, cycling, tennis, even gardening) because it helps release tension, helps clear your mind of distressing thoughts, and improves your overall fitness level.

An ideal combination of activity involves aerobic, stretching, and toning exercises.

- Aerobic activity involves repetitive movements of large muscle groups. This kind of activity helps strengthen your cardiovascular system and increase stamina. Examples include jogging, swimming, brisk walking, bicycling, and tennis.
- Stretching activity is slow, sustained, and relaxing. The goal is to decrease muscle tension, improve flexibility, and maintain joint mobility. Yoga is a good example of stretching.
- Toning activities focus on firming specific muscle groups. Examples include weightlifting (resistance training), sit-ups, stomach crunches, and push-ups.

Get active: Your action plan

Step 1: Determine your pre-activity fitness level

If you are not used to exerting yourself, be cautious before increasing your activity level because it can lead to injury (e.g. muscle strain) which, in turn, could frustrate you.

If you lead a fairly sedentary lifestyle, are overweight, smoke, or have any limiting health conditions, always increase your activity levels slowly (e.g. increase your distance or pace of walking very gradually over time).

A good way to determine your readiness for activity, and the amount and frequency of activity that will be helpful for you, is to consult your doctor or health care provider.

Additionally, consult your doctor if any of the following symptoms emerge during activity: dizziness, irregular heart beats, a tightness or pressure in your chest, shoulders, arms, or neck, or if you feel extreme exhaustion or breathlessness after you have stopped the activity.

Otherwise, if all systems are go, proceed to step 2!

Step 2: Consider these questions

When planning to increase your activity level, consider these kinds of questions:

- Do you want to improve cardiovascular functioning or weight management (emphasis on aerobic activities), muscle flexibility (emphasis on stretching), or improve tone and strength (strengthening activities)? Or some combination of these?
- Do you prefer indoor or outdoor activity? Being alone or with others? Competition (e.g. sports) or not?
- How much time are you willing to devote to improving your activity level and controlling your stress? What time of day is best for you to be active?

Step 3: Consider your activity options

Activities of light intensity include:

- strolling
- gardening
- playing Frisbee
- bowling
- yoga (gentle forms, e.g. Hatha yoga)

Activities of moderate intensity include:

- brisk walking
- biking
- dancing
- push-ups or sit-ups or light weight lifting
- climbing stairs
- tennis
- in-line skating
- swimming
- yoga (moderate forms, e.g. PowerYoga or Ashtanga Yoga)

Activities of vigorous intensity include:

- jogging
- aerobics
- yoga (power forms)
- jumping jacks
- soccer
- squash
- rope jumping

Step 4: Establish activity goals

Consider the information from the preceding steps and set some specific goals for yourself.

For example, if you like to exercise with others and have a daily lunch break, consider a brisk walk with friends for half of your break (the other for eating your lunch). Be sure that your goals are specific, achievable, and motivating.

Use the space below to record your activity goals for the upcoming week, two weeks from now, and one month from now.

Step 5: Identify any obstacles to increasing your activity level

What might interfere with your plans or goals for increased activity (e.g. motivation, forgetfulness, lack of equipment, lack of time, uncertain how to perform an activity)?

Describe your potential obstacles in the space below and how you will deal with them if they arise.

For example: "My biggest obstacle is motivation. So I will plan to exercise with a friend and we will help motivate each other."

Step 6: Track your progress with a daily activity diary

Successful change requires that you track your progress so that you know when you are being successful at increasing your activity level.

A daily activity diary can help. Here, you record:

- Your activity throughout the day, including a description of the activity.
- The duration and intensity of the activity.
- Any comments or thoughts you had before, during, and after the activity.

At the end of this action plan there is a “daily activity diary” that you can use. Photocopy or print extra copies for yourself and use these as long as you like or until activity becomes a habit in your life and you find that you no longer need to keep track of your progress.

Step 7: Reward yourself

Finally, a good action plan includes a reward to celebrate your success. How will you reward your progress? How often will you reward yourself? Use the space below to describe your plan to reward yourself.

For example: “At the end of a successful week of lunch-break walking, I will reward myself by going to a movie with a friend” or “when I finish two weeks of attending the regular yoga classes at my fitness centre, I will reward myself by shopping for some new clothing.”

Exercise/Daily Activity Diary

Week of:

	Activity	Duration or intensity (low, med, high)	Comments (how did you feel afterwards)
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

Strategy 6: Reduce Tension

Stress-related tension is an almost inevitable part of everyday living. Apart from being an uncomfortable burden, stress-related tension can lead to a variety of problems such as headaches, back pain, and exhaustion, to name a few.

Despite the fact that each of us may experience tension slightly differently, anyone can learn to release that tension. All it takes is:

- knowing how to relax,
- practicing relaxation techniques, and
- choosing a technique that works best for you

The following steps present different relaxation options. Experiment with them until you find the most effective method of relaxation for you. Alternatively, use different techniques on different occasions.

Note: Each of these techniques is presented with step-by-step instruction. Until you master the exercise, you may want to make an audio recording to help direct you.

Reduce tension: Identify areas of tension

Before you begin to relax you should first determine where you hold tension in your body. For some people, this may be the head, neck or back. For others, it may be the stomach, etc..

Close your eyes and ask yourself what sounds you are aware of.

For example, are you aware of the sound of traffic outside your window?

Or perhaps the sound of someone talking far off in the distance?

Or the sound of a radio or a television in another room?

Take note of the sounds that are around you,

And slowly shift your attention to your body and to your physical state.

Start with your head and work down towards your toes,

Mentally scanning your body and taking note of your body's sensations.

For example, perhaps you are aware of a slight itch at the back of your neck,

Or a tightness in your abdomen.

Once you have scanned your entire body for any areas of tension,

Open your eyes and take a mental note of where you tend to hold tension in your body.

Reduce tension: Identify your breathing pattern

Deep, full, relaxed breathing is a powerful and profound way of releasing tension and controlling stress. To become aware of your pattern of breathing, try the following.

Place one of your hands upon your stomach somewhere around your belly button area,

Then place the other hand on your chest, right in the centre.

And for the next few moments, as you sit still and breathe normally,

Take note of the pattern of movement of your two hands.

As you breathe in and breathe out, does one hand move more than the other?

Does the lower hand move more than the upper hand?

Does the upper hand move more than the lower hand?

Do both hands move at about the same amount?

If your upper hand moves more than your lower hand, you are breathing in a short and shallow fashion that will contribute to stress.

If your lower hand moves more than your upper hand, you are breathing in a deep and full fashion and this will help manage your stress.

As you take a few more moments to notice your breathing try to breathe in deeply and exhale fully so that you feel your lower hand moving inwards and outwards.

Spend a few moments practicing this full deep relaxed breathing, using the movements of your hands as a sign that can tell you whether or not you are breathing in a relaxed fashion or a stressed fashion.



Reduce tension: Breathe to relax

Try this breathing technique that is designed to help you relax and release tension.

Once you have practiced this technique a few times each day over the course of one week, you will be able to call upon your skill of relaxed breathing anywhere at anytime. You do not have to lie down to do this, the purpose of lying down in the early stages is just to be sure that you recognize when you are breathing deeply and that you train yourself to do so at will.

Lie on the floor, or sit comfortably in a chair, with one hand resting around your stomach area, and with the other hand resting somewhere near the top of your chest.

Close your eyes and bring your attention to your breathing.

Breathe slowly and fully through your nose to a very slow count such as this:

Breathe in and hold....one...two...three....and breathe out....one...two....three.

As you inhale try to focus on causing your lower hand to move up and down with each full breath inwards.

Be sure that you breathe deeply enough that you expand your abdomen and feel your lower hand moving inwards and outwards.

Each time you breathe in, pause for a moment when your lungs are full and then slowly exhale through your lips...

Again, to a slow count of one...two...three.

As you exhale try to focus on moving your lower hand move inwards towards your back as if you are pulling inward

And feel your lower back pressing towards the floor or into the back of your chair,

Be sure that you expel all of the air from the bottom of your lungs...allowing your hands to collapse naturally inwards towards your body,

Repeat this five or six times...each time inhaling slowly and fully and exhaling slowly and fully,

A modified version for daily use is as follows:

Sit comfortably in a chair.

Breathe in deeply and slowly and say to yourself "breathe in relaxation."

After pausing for a moment, breathe out fully from your abdomen and say to yourself "and release tension." Pause again before you inhale.

Use this technique on any occasion when you want to release tension (e.g. while sitting in traffic, standing in line, while waiting on the telephone "on hold", etc.).

Reduce tension: Relax your muscles

A good technique to relax your entire body is to alternately tense and relax each of the major muscle groups in your body, as you breathe deeply and fully. With this technique, you need to alternate between tension and relaxation. Specifically, try to make your muscles tense, holding that tension for a few moments, and then, all at once, release the tension while thinking to yourself “relax.”

The point of this exercise is to first cause yourself to experience tension, hold that tension, and suddenly release it. You will find that this helps you attain a more relaxed state than if you simply try to relax from a normal, non-tensed position (it's kind of like swinging a pendulum...to get the pendulum to swing far to one side, you first pull it far to the other side and let go).

A couple of important points:

- When you release the tension in the muscles, let it go all at once, not slowly. Let your muscles become suddenly limp.
- Be cautious about tensing your muscles too much (especially those in your neck and back). As well, over tightening your feet muscles can lead to a cramp.
- Most people have only limited success when they first try this exercise. However, once you practice this twice a day for two weeks (e.g. upon awakening and upon going to sleep) you will find that you can use it to attain a more relaxed state than you have ever experienced. It is a profoundly powerful technique of relaxation once you become skilled at it.



Sit in a comfortable chair and curl both hands into fists

At the same time, tightening your forearms and your biceps.

Hold the tension for a few moments.

Keep holding and all at once...let go of the tension...just...relax.

Let's do that one more time.

Tighten curl both hands into fists, tighten your forearms and your biceps, and hold the tension for a few moments.

Keep holding and all at once, let the tension go...and just relax.

Next, wrinkle your face, almost as if you are smelling something awful...purse your lips...and raise your eyebrows.

Now hold this tension in your face for a few moments...keep holding...continuing to breathe normally...

And all at once, let the tension go...just, relax.

Let's do that one more time.

Wrinkle your face, almost as if you are smelling something awful...purse your lips...and raise your eyebrows.

Now hold this tension in your face for a few moments...keep holding...continuing to breathe normally...

And all at once, let the tension go...just, relax.

Next, slightly round your back and tighten your abdomen, keep breathing normally, and hold this for a few moments, then all at once let the tension go, and relax.

Let's do that again.

Slightly round your back and tighten your abdomen, keep breathing normally, and hold this for a few moments, then all at once let the tension go, and relax.

Finally, tense your feet by lifting your toes upward, tightening your shins.

Hold this for a few moments, breathing normally, and all at once, let the tension go, and relax.

And one more time.

Tense your feet by lifting your toes upward, tightening your shins.

Hold this for a few moments, breathing normally, and all at once, let the tension go, and relax.

Now spend a few moments focusing on your deep relaxed breathing and paying allowing all of the muscles in your body to relax...just let the tension flow away from you...with each breath inwards, breathe in feelings of relaxation and calm....and with each breath outwards, release any tension and any stress.

Reduce tension: Visualization

Your imagination is a powerful tool to help you relax. It simply involves pairing a peaceful, relaxing image with another relaxation technique (e.g. visualization paired with relaxed breathing).

Keep in mind:

- When using visualization try using all of your senses. Imagine what your peaceful scene sounds like, what it smells like, what you can feel.
- Be sure that you are free from other distractions or interruptions for the period that you are doing the relaxation exercise (e.g. turn off your pager, put a "do not disturb" sign on your door).
- Visualization is fun. Let your imagination run free and wild. You can imagine anything you want.

Try the following.

Lie down, close your eyes, and relax. Take slow, deep breaths, and, as you spend a few minutes in this position, think about any of the following:

Warm, beautiful colors, fading from one hue to another (e.g. a warm red fading to a pale blue).

A beach scene, with the palms swaying gently in the warm breeze and the ocean waves lapping against white sand.

A favorite image from the present or your childhood (e.g. watching your puppy bounce through some tall grass).

Any special place that holds meaning and peace for you.



Reduce tension: Action plan

To master a technique of relaxation you need to practice. The goal of practicing relaxation is to become so skilled at relaxing that you can invoke a relaxed state whenever and wherever you need to.

Step 1. Choose a relaxation technique

Choose a technique of relaxation, or a combination of techniques (e.g. breathing or a combination of breathing and visualization). Use the space below to record your choice.

Step 2. Identify obstacles

What might interfere with trying your chosen technique of relaxation (e.g. motivation, forgetfulness, unsure how to relax)?

Describe your potential obstacles in the space below and how you will deal with them if they arise. For example: "My biggest obstacle is that I will forget to practice. So I will post a reminder by my bed that I will see before getting out of bed in the morning, and upon going to bed at night."

Step 3. Track your progress

Successful change requires that you track your progress so that you know when you are being successful at relaxation.

At the end of this section there is a relaxation practice log that you can use to keep track of your progress. If you prefer, you can keep track of your progress in a notebook or journal of your choosing. Whatever method you choose, be sure that your practice log contains a measure of your state of relaxation before and after your practice session.

Step 4. Reward yourself

Finally, a good action plan includes a reward to celebrate your success. How will you reward your progress? How often will you reward yourself?

For example: "When I finish my first week of practice, I will reward myself by going out to a fun movie with a friend."

Relaxation Practice Log

Use this 10-point scale before and after you practice a relaxation technique.

0

2

4

6

8

10

Not at all stressed.
Completely calm.

Extremely stressed.
Most stress I have felt.

	Technique	Tension (before)	Tension (after)	Notes
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Strategy 7: Stay Connected

Have you ever experienced a time in your life when you were so involved and passionate about something or someone that nothing else seemed to matter...you felt as if you could take on the world...your energy level was high...and nothing could get you down?

That's what "staying connected" is about. And 'staying connected' is a powerful way to fuel your spirit and keep you happy, healthy, and energized.

This section is about staying connected to people and passion. It is about discovering what is important in your life, rekindling passion that you may have lost, and staying connected to the people and activities that provide meaning and support to you.

Staying connected requires that you:

1. Identify what gives meaning to your life.
2. Rekindle passions and connections. And,
3. Spend time with people who support you.

Step 1: Identify what gives meaning to your life

The very first step to 'stay connected' is to identify what gives meaning to your life. What are your passions? What gives your life meaning? For each of the following categories, describe the people or activities that contribute meaning and passion to your life.

Relationships. For example partner/spouse, children, family members, good friends, co-workers, old friends, customers.

Self-expression. For example hobbies and interests, painting, music, gardening, writing, building, creating, discussion groups, dressing to suit yourself.

Spiritual or religious involvement. For example church, faith group, God.

Community involvement. For example, volunteer work, participating in community activities, joining with neighbors, supporting charities.

Art and creativity. For example, attending musical events or theatre, visiting art galleries, creating your own art, playing a musical instrument, contributing to the arts, learning about art.

Nature. For example, hiking outdoors, gardening, walking and absorbing the sights and sounds.

Step 2: Rekindle passions and connections

Consider the people or activities that you've just identified as being important and giving meaning to your life and list three passions or connections that you want to grow or continue to keep alive in your life. For example, you may enjoy walks in nature but you may not have taken the time for a nature walk in the past decade. Or perhaps you find artistic expression important but you have no current outlet for expressing yourself.

Below, identify the top three passions or connections you want to rekindle or keep alive.

Passion/Connection 1:

Passion/Connection 2:

Passion/Connection 3:

Now that you have picked three passions or connections that you want to rekindle, pick one of these and, below, describe exactly what steps you will take this upcoming week to rekindle or revive it. Be very specific.

For example, if you want to rekindle a passion for music, you could write "I will look up the times of a musical performance in my local theatre and attend that performance with a friend."

Step 3: Spend time with people who support you

Now that you have identified the people and activities that help give meaning to your life, and taken steps to rekindle those passions, you need to plan to spend time with people who are supportive of you.

Think about this: Who can you depend on for support? Who do you feel comfortable talking with? Who handles challenging situations better than you (so you can follow their example)?

Write the name(s) below.

Think about how you are going to contribute to that relationship. What do you have to offer to help further the bond that you have together and show your appreciation for that supportive relationship? How can you contribute meaningfully to the relationship (e.g. express your gratitude to the person, do something you know they will appreciate)? Record your thoughts below.

Finally, learn from others who are passionate. Select someone who is passionate about what they do and who seems energized and uplifted and optimistic. Think about the following:

1. How does this person describe their interests and passions?

2. What happens to this person's face or voice when they talk about their passion? Do they become filled with colour and life?

3. What can you learn from this person that you can apply to your own life?

4. How can you begin to surround yourself with people who have passion for life?

Module 3. Getting More Help

Nobody is an expert at handling all of life's challenges and difficulties. Sometimes it just seems that no matter what you try on your own it just isn't enough. Sometimes it's because you're not trying the right strategy and sometimes it's because there's just too much happening in your life all at once. So it's important to consider getting professional help.

You should consider getting professional help if any of the following are true:

- You feel emotionally overwhelmed.
- You are very concerned about your physical or emotional health.
- Your own effort at solving your problems is not working quickly or effectively.
- You notice that your suffering is significantly affecting your work or the lives of people that are important to you.

Treatment options

There are several effective options for treating the low mood, and other symptoms, that are associated with depression. Some of the treatments come from the medical model (e.g. antidepressant medication); others from the psychological model (e.g. cognitive-behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy); still others originate from less researched theories (e.g., light therapy, herbal remedies).

This section outlines the goals of these treatments and offers some information to help educate you so that you can become a better health consumer.

Be informed about the goals of treatment

There are three goals of treatment, regardless of the option(s) you choose. These are:

- To relieve your unhappy symptoms (e.g. improve mood).
- To return to normal functioning at home, work, and socially. And
- To reduce the likelihood that your low mood or depression will recur.

Choose treatment(s) wisely

Until fairly recently, choosing a treatment for depression was a confusing experience and most people followed the advice of well-meaning, but sometimes ill-informed professionals, friends, and television or radio advice shows. To complicate matters further, there is an excess of slickly marketed self-help books and herbal remedies that promise you quick relief.

Although well-meaning, the evidence for these treatments is usually based on individual experience rather than research.

Now we know better. Scientific studies have proven many treatment methods to be effective, and some flawed. The treatment suggestions presented in this course are proven effective by rigorous and thorough clinical study.

Talk to your health care provider

If you are unable to improve your mood through your own efforts, you may need to consult a health care provider, such as your physician or, if you are participating in therapy, your therapist.

If this is the case, be sure that you talk to that person openly and candidly about your experience.

Remember the following:

- Depression is a serious problem. If your depression (or low mood) is seriously interfering with your life, tell your health care provider. It will ensure that you are taken seriously and that you get the help that you need.
- Depression is not uncommon. In fact, compared to when our grandparents were young, depression is 10 times more widespread and strikes people 10 years earlier, on average.
- Depression is not a sign of personal weakness. Sometimes there are medical reasons for how you feel and sometimes the events and circumstances of your life simply overwhelm your ability to cope.
- Depression and low mood can be treated. There are very effective treatments, some you can do for yourself and some that require professional help.

What kind of professional advice is helpful?

There are many kinds of professionals who provide counseling and related assistance. These include:

- Psychologists and counsellors (e.g. registered clinical counsellors or social workers with a private practice designation)
- Health care practitioners (e.g. your family doctor)
- Occupational health nurses
- Employee Assistance professionals
- A spiritual adviser (depending on your religious affiliation, e.g., a minister, priest or other cleric)

Depending on the community where you live, you may also find community services and self-help groups available to you.

How to choose a therapist

For many people, the best choice for help is from a professional counsellor or therapist (e.g. a registered psychologist).

To help choose the right therapist for you, consider asking potential therapists the following:

- Do you have a current license to practice counselling or psychology? What is your educational and professional background?
- What experience do you have with helping people who have concerns like mine?
- How will you know which treatment approach is best for me?
- How will you know if the treatment is working? How will I know?
- What are your fees? Are there any reimbursements available to me (e.g. through an employee assistance program offered by your employer)?
- When are you available for appointments? What about after-hours calls?
- What is your cancellation policy?
- What is your policy on confidentiality and privacy of the information we discuss?

About medication

The medical treatment of depression is based on three principles:

- Depression is primarily a physical illness.
- Depressed mood is determined by problems in brain chemistry. And,
- Curing the physical illness thereby cures the depression.

Know the classes of medication The first step in educating yourself about medical treatments for depression and low mood is to understand the types of medication available. Generally speaking, each medication falls into one of five 'classes' depending on its precise function on the brain. These classes are listed below, followed by some examples of the brand name medication in capitals.

1. Tetracyclics (e.g. maprotiline or LUDIOMIL, mirtazapine or REMERON)
2. Dopamine reuptake inhibitors (e.g. bupropion or WELLBUTRIN)
3. Tricyclics (e.g. amitriptyline or ELAVIL, doxepin or SINEQUAN)
4. Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (e.g. phenelzine or NARDIL, tranylcypromine or PARNATE)
5. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (e.g. fluoxetine or PROZAC, paroxetine or PAXIL, sertraline or ZOLOFT)

Taking a pill (to improve mood, lessen anxiety, etc.) may seem harmless but it is not without potential complications. Educating yourself about these medications may be the best defense against these problems and will ensure that you derive the maximum benefit from their use.

The advantages of medications are that:

1. They are easy to take.
2. They may begin to relieve your symptoms faster than therapy.
3. They are not addictive. And,
4. They do not prevent you from working and, in fact, will hasten your return to productive functioning.

The disadvantages of medications are that:

1. Not everyone benefits from taking them.
2. Some people don't like consuming medication.
3. Some medication requires that you adhere to a strict regimen or diet.
4. The first medication you try may not be the one that eventually works for you. And, 5. Medication may temporarily resolve a suicidal crisis but it is no guarantee against future attempts.

Medication: Comply with treatment

Medication is only effective when taken properly, yet as many as 30% of people do not take them as prescribed. To ensure that you get the maximum benefit from your medication, ask the prescribing health care provider the following questions:

1. How often do I have to take my medication and when do I need to take it?
2. What do I do if I forget to take a dose?
3. Are there any special dietary restrictions that I need to know about?
4. What are the most common side effects that I may experience?
5. Can I drink alcohol while taking this medication?
6. How will I know if the medication is working?
7. How long do I have to take this medication?
8. Are there any other medications that I cannot use while taking this one?
9. What is the cost? Is there a cheaper alternative?

Note: If workplace safety is a concern (e.g., operating heavy machinery) mention this to the prescribing health care provider, or the pharmacist, and get their advice.

Know the potential side effects

Antidepressants may cause mild and, usually, temporary side effects in some people. Typically these are annoying, but they are usually not serious and will decrease with time. If they cause you concern, report them to your doctor. Some of the more common side effects of anti-depressant medication are:

1. Dry mouth and/or constipation. Relieve dry mouth and constipation by drinking more water, chewing gum, or selecting high-fiber foods.
2. Dizziness. Be cautious about arising too quickly from a seated position.
3. Changes in sexual function, blurred vision, drowsiness, nausea, headache, agitation, or insomnia. These side effects are often temporary and resolve in time, or with a lowered dose of medication.

Don't rely upon medication alone

Medications are a means to an end. They may provide you with temporary relief from your unhappiness but you may still need to attend to the circumstances that triggered or contributed to this unhappiness (e.g. marital problems, unresolved grief).

Do not look towards doctors or pills as a short-cut to well-being and happiness. Be sure that you take other steps to improve your mood, such as those outlined in the self-care sections of this course and/or psychological therapy.

Professional help: About therapy

The two best psychological therapies for treating depression and improving mood are cognitive-behavioral and interpersonal. In general, these therapies help you to:

1. Recognize the connection between thought, feeling, and action.
2. Identify exaggerated beliefs of inadequacy (e.g., "I am worthless"). And,
3. Understand and change relationship conflicts that contribute to your depression.

What makes therapy effective?

Some of the characteristics of effective therapy are listed below:

1. A therapist who actively questions and supports you.
2. A clear and sensible rationale.
3. Emphasis on things that take place within and between therapy sessions, not just from childhood.
4. Encouragement to test ideas and question beliefs about the world. This helps to develop a more realistic point of view and experience healthier relationships.
5. Specific, achievable goals that are determined together with your therapist. These may involve returning to work, improving social relations, happier day-to-day mood, reduced stress, lessened anxiety, etc..
6. Encouragement to attribute treatment to your own efforts.
7. Time limitations. Generally, therapy lasts from 6 to 20 sessions.
8. A follow-up (or maintenance) plan. This helps continue the effects of treatment beyond the life of individual therapy sessions.

Complying with treatment

Your active participation in therapy is essential for improvement. Be sure that you:

1. Attend each of your sessions. Make keeping appointments your priority.
2. Be honest and open with your therapist. If you are uncomfortable talking about your private thoughts, tell him or her.
3. Complete the tasks that are assigned to you by your therapist. And,
4. Keep your therapist informed of your progress and let them know if you are unhappy about how things are going.

Therapy: Advantages and disadvantages

Psychologists offer psychotherapy. These professionals usually have a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.) or master's degree (M.S. or M.A.). Like medical doctors, psychologists have to be licensed by a state or registered in a province in order to practice. Other licenced mental health professionals also offer counseling and therapy. These include social workers, clinical counselors, nurse practitioners, and some psychiatrists.

The advantages of therapy techniques are:

1. They empower you to change your situation or your perceptions of that situation.
2. They teach skills that can be used beyond the end of therapy.
3. They may be more appealing to people who refuse to, or cannot, take medication.
4. In some cases, they may have longer lasting effects than medication.
5. They have no physical side effects.

The disadvantages of therapy techniques are:

1. They may take longer to relieve some symptoms. These techniques work gradually and may take 8 to 10 weeks to show a full effect (compared to about six weeks for medication).
2. They are not the first treatment choice for severe depression or for people who are suicidal. As with medication, it is important to remember that each of us may react in different ways to similar treatments. While many people find psychotherapy effective, some do not. If you do not feel any better after six weeks, talk to your health care provider about other treatments.

As with medication, it is important to remember that each of us may react in different ways to similar treatments. While many people find psychotherapy effective, some do not. If you do not feel any better after six weeks, talk to your health care provider about other treatments.

Professional help: Other options

There are a wide range of other options for improving mood and treating depression. However, these should not be used in place of standard care (medical treatment or psychological therapy).

The two most widely used options are discussed in this section: light therapy and herbal remedies.

Ensure that you read this section carefully if you are intending to pursue any non-standard therapy for your low mood. Additionally, be sure that you consult your health care provider about your intent.

Light therapy or “phototherapy”

Some people experience changes in depressed mood at specific times of the year. This pattern of depression has been given its own name--seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

In its most common form, SAD is a serious depression that recurs each year at the same time in the fall or winter and ends in the spring. Studies suggest that most people have a mild seasonal change in mood, appetite, sleep, and alertness and that this is normal. So a proper clinical diagnosis of SAD is essential in order to differentiate SAD from a more typical depression, or a normal mood change.

Taking Control of Your Mood

Some of the symptoms of SAD are relieved by light therapy. This involves exposure to bright light, under controlled conditions. Light therapies are receiving increasing support from research studies. However, the exact reasons for their effectiveness is open to debate, some people experience side effects (e.g. headaches, eye strain), and the long-term effects of prolonged exposure to bright light is unknown. As with any mood disorder, do not self-diagnose and do not purchase light therapy without medical guidance.

Finally, studies have shown that an hour's walk outside during the winter is as effective as 2 1/2 hours under bright artificial light. So give walking a try first, daily for a period of several weeks, and see whether this helps improve your mood.

Herbal remedies

Herbal remedies have received increasing media attention as effective "natural" therapeutic methods for improving mood. However, you must use extreme caution and good judgement before relying upon an herbal supplement. The most popular of these, for improving mood, is St. John's Wort.

These remedies are easily purchased over-the-counter and make appealing claims, therefore they give a false sense of security that they are safer than anti-depressant medications. However, something labelled "natural" does not necessarily mean that its effects are safe. Modern medications have been rigorously studied and their effects and side effects well documented. Most herbal remedies have yet to undergo this scrutiny.

As well, pharmacologists have not explained the chemical action of herbal remedies. For example, St. John's Wort appears to act like an antidepressant by altering brain chemistry, but there are at least 10 possible constituents that may contribute to this effect.

Finally, never mix herbal remedies with other anti-depressant medications (this can lead to serious elevations in blood pressure), do not use them if your depression is severe or if you have suicidal thoughts, and do not use them if you are pregnant.

Consult your physician before consuming any herbal supplement intended to improve your mood.

Module 4: Learn more

Websites and books

To learn more about improving low mood, there are many resources on the internet. Our recommendations are contained in the 'Learn more' section of the course. We have also included suggested books that you can refer to for more information about improving low mood.

Web search guidelines

The internet offers a wealth of health-related information. However, not all of the health-related information you will encounter on the internet will be accurate or helpful (the links provided through this course are an exception...they have been reviewed for you and they are good sources of information).

So here are four questions that you should ask yourself when searching for information on the internet.

1. Who is the author of the information and what are their credentials?
2. When was the information last updated?
3. What is this information based on? The best information is based on research and generally accepted clinical practice guidelines.
4. Who is funding the site? Be wary of advice offered by for-profit commercial ventures that are not affiliated with a professional health-related organization.

Finally, be cautious when following advice from an internet resource. The internet should only be used as a supplement to professional advice and should never be used to self-diagnose.

Always discuss your findings with a health professional and ask them how to best incorporate that information into your plan for improving your mood.

Conclusion

When you feel down or 'blue' or depressed, the psychological pain can seem unbearable, as if nothing could ever take it away. You must force yourself to listen to this message: Your sad mood will not be everlasting. Even the most seriously depressed people get better when they get help.

The good news is that there is a lot of effective help. Some of this help comes in the form of medication, some in the form of therapy, and some in the form of lifestyle changes.

The most important thing you can do to manage your low mood is to take advantage of self-care strategies (eating well, getting proper sleep, becoming action-centered, keeping active, reducing tension, thinking positively, and staying connected to people and passion).

The worst thing you can do is ignore your feelings, avoid your friends, and lie in bed for days on end. You may not FEEL like being active and taking care of yourself, but that has nothing to do with whether or no you CAN get active and take care of yourself.

Ultimately, whether or not you are going to feel happy in your life will depend entirely on you. Not your inherited family tendencies, not what other people do to you, and not the circumstances that you find yourself in.

Many people have genetic tendencies to depression, are hurt or intentionally abused by others, and face debilitating life circumstances, yet they live happy lives filled with joyous moments.

Happiness is entirely under your control. It has everything to do with how you choose to look at the world and the choices that you make based on what you see.

In the end, it may be that there will always be some sadness and unhappiness in your life. This is normal and part of everybody's experience. Whether there is ongoing happiness, though, will depend upon the choices that you make in life, your participation in meaningful and productive work, the quality of your supportive relationships, and your continued optimism.

Mood improvement journal

For each day you are practicing a technique from this course, keep a record of where and when you used that technique (i.e. the circumstances or event) and your mood before and after using the technique.

Use the following scale:

0	2	4	6	8	10
Very low mood. Never felt unhappier.			Very happy. Completely content.		

Time (circumstances)	Technique	My mood	
		Before	After
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10
		0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10