A Step-by-Step Guide to Working Towards Depression Recovery

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Recovering from Depression: What to Expect

Some people can have one bout of depression. Maybe there was a negative life event that triggered it: a death, a breakup of a relationship, or a major life transition can bring about a depressive episode.

Perhaps it lasts for a few weeks or a few months marked by symptoms like low mood, changes in sleep, changes in eating, low motivation, low energy, and feelings of guilt and worthlessness. Then, over time, the symptoms begin to fade as their body and their brain manage the symptoms. Afterward, they return to their previous level of functioning and life continues. They recover.

Some people have depression that is chronic and relapsing. This means that it is long-lasting, can be alleviated, and then returns at a later time. For these people, the battle against depression is a lifelong struggle that tests their levels of perseverance and optimism.

Naturally, when depressed, these qualities can begin to diminish as recovery feels like more of an impossible task. The mission becomes finding ways to take recovery from impossible to probable.

Begin Self-Monitoring

Self-monitoring goes by many names, with the common theme of paying attention to yourself, your symptoms, and how you are affected by the world around you. The notion is that to know where you are going, you first have to know where you are.

Tracking your mood, your sleep, your diet, and your activity level might seem like an exercise that will only reinforce thoughts of depression, but the opposite is true usually.

By tracking and studying your symptoms, you will begin to notice small changes that may not have been perceivable previously. With these changes, trends and patterns will begin to emerge.

Maybe your mood is improved slightly on days you get outside. Maybe your mood is worse on days you don’t speak to anyone on the phone. By identifying these patterns, you begin to develop of sense of power and control with your mental health.

Set Recovery Goals

If you want to achieve recovery from your chronic depression, you must set recovery goals. Your depression is not going to vanish over time; it requires high levels of effort and energy. Setting goals is the best way to gain direction and motivation towards finding your recovery.

Using the information gathered from self-monitoring, what recovery goals seem reasonable? Do you think you can

cure your depression? Do you think your depression can be eliminated through changes to your diet only?

The best recovery goals are going to be realistic based on your current functioning. They will be specific, so you know exactly what you are working towards. Saying you want to be happy makes sense, but it is such a broad concept that is hard to describe in more detail.

Also, good goals will be measurable. This will allow you to know when you making progress and accomplishing your goal.

Consider goals that are more narrow and measurable like:

- I will get out of the house for one hour each day.
- I will have a conversation with a new person weekly.
- I will spend one hour each day working to speak kindly and optimistically to myself.
- I will exercise 30 minutes at least three times weekly.

These goals may not seem monumental, and that is purposeful. Recovery goals do not need to be a grand affair. They only need to be moving in the desired direction.

Next page: how to work towards completing your recovery goals.

Set Recovery Goals

You can commit to multiple goals simultaneously. Even better, once one goal has been accomplished, you can start expanding your goals and making them more challenging.

Creating Movement

You have used self-monitoring to gain awareness of your current state. You have set recovery goals that are reasonable, specific and measurable. Now, all you need to do is move towards completing these goals. How do you do that?

Therapy

For someone with depression, therapy is a must. A therapist is a trained professional that has the knowledge and experience to help with the monitoring and goal-setting as well as moving you towards these goals.

Many therapists are trained in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which involves investigating your thoughts, feelings and behaviors to note how they are connected and interrelated. This allows the opportunity to improve your feelings by addressing the others.

Medication Management

Medication is not for everyone, but for millions of people, it is helpful. Many medications for depression help by increasing the amount of desirable neurotransmitters in the brain. With more serotonin or norepinephrine, your mood will be better and your energy will be higher.

Most medications have some risk of side effects, but this is not certain for every person. Many gladly accept the side effect for the reduced symptoms.

Physical Health

There is absolutely a connection between how you feel mentally and how you feel physically. For years, people have observed the positive changes with mental health associated with positive changes to physical health.

By improving your sleep habits, diet, and level of physical activity, you will change your mental status. Exercise, for example, has been associated to many positive mental health outcomes. Some report that daily exercise is as beneficial as taking an antidepressant.

Social Health

Unsurprisingly, having fun with people you care about will aid your movement towards depression recovery. Your social health can be improved by adding more positive social experiences to your life like going places and doing things with people you enjoy.

On the other hand, your social health can improve by reducing the contact with negative people in your life. If someone is overly negative, controlling, manipulating or abusive, life will be better without them.

Be cautious, though. While depressed, your depression may try to convince you supportive people should be excluded from your life. Hold on the ones that are caring, generous, and make you feel worthwhile.

Finding recovery from depression is a lifelong task. It is one with opportunity for success and failure. Be sure to assign the proper amount of control to your situation, though. Depression will return, and it does not mean you failed — it only means you have more work to do.