Depression Distractions: Are They Friend or Foe?

by KAYLEY REED

Counteracting Depression Distractions

On so many levels, depression is one of the most challenging things I've ever dealt with.

It's an illness that makes you feel isolated and alone, even when surrounded by people you love. It's a heavy weight that makes getting out of bed virtually impossible.

It's not just self-doubt and worthlessness, but at times…numbness. It's feeling nothing at all — an empty mind with no purpose or passion.

Distractions and escapism have always been my "cop out" method of dealing with depression. Mostly because actually dealing with whatever you're going through can be really hard.

So instead of letting myself be alone with my thoughts when I'm in a low place, I'd distract myself with my favorite TV show, or scroll for hours on my phone before bed.

When I started doing this, I truly was just searching for an escape. I wanted a way to get out of my own head, and avoid the negative self-talk that was consuming my thoughts.

But sooner than later, this need to "escape" started to take over my daily life.

I would meet up with friends for a drink, and rather than be present and participate, I found myself yearning for a distraction. I would sit down to watch a movie and pull out my phone for another layer of diversion.

Every night before bed I would need the TV to be on to fall asleep. My mind became used to being distracted by anything that wasn't actually in front of me, even when I was "happy."

As I write this, I'm realizing how relevant distractions are in my life.

I sat down a couple hours ago with every intent of writing this, but distracted myself with social media and playing with my hair and taking "email breaks," rather than trying to form words around the most vulnerable parts of my life.

I'm probably not the only one with this problem.

Social Media Makes It Easy to Escape

The constant, ever presence of screens in our faces makes it easy to distract ourselves from the people right in front of us — and from our own thoughts.

It’s challenging to sit still and do nothing. I guess that’s why mindfulness, yoga and meditation for depression have been growing in popularity.

Personally, a lot of my growth has happened through simply getting to know myself better. Paying attention to when and why I feel the need to distract myself, what I distract myself with, and taking time to clear my mind with simple self-care activities.

Some of My Favorite Ways to Counteract Depression Distractions

- Stand up, close your eyes, and follow your breathing.
- Do some basic stretches for five minutes.
- Put some headphones in and listen to a mellow playlist while focusing on one specific task that you can accomplish easily (like cooking a meal!).
- Take a bubble bath, light some candles, put your phone far, far away.
- Instead of watching TV before bed, try listening to a podcast, or reading for 30 minutes.
- At work, close all the tabs and windows that you don’t need for the task you’re doing.

Self-awareness is not easy. Recognizing when you’re triggered, and proactively taking care of your mental health is an art that not even I have fully mastered.

But I have consciously tried to stop using distractions as a coping mechanism. It’s hard when I’m having a bad day, or am in a low state of mind, but I’ve become more willing in letting myself be completely vulnerable — to let myself feel all the feelings rather than distract myself from them.