

Depression

Evidence-based strategies for lifting the weight

Depression is more than sadness. It is a complex condition that affects mood, thinking, energy, sleep, appetite, and physical health. It is also highly treatable. You are not broken, lazy, or weak. Depression changes the brain in ways that make helpful actions feel impossible, and it is those same actions that are what rewire the brain towards recovery.

Recognizing Depression

Common signs include persistent low mood, loss of interest or pleasure in activities, changes in sleep or appetite, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness, and in some cases, thoughts of death or self-harm. You do not need to experience all of these, and it is important to recognize that depression looks different in different people.

Important

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm, please reach out to a mental health professional, or call/text 988 (Canada Suicide Crisis Helpline) immediately. You do not have to navigate this alone.

The Depression Trap & the Way Out

Depression creates a *self-reinforcing cycle*: low mood leads to withdrawal and inactivity, which reinforces low mood. Behavioural Activation — deliberately scheduling meaningful and pleasurable activities — is one of the most well-researched interventions for depression. Action comes before motivation, not after.

Evidence-Based Tools

01 Behavioural Activation

Schedule activities that give you a sense of pleasure or accomplishment, even when you don't feel like it. Start very small: a 5-minute walk, making your bed, texting one person. Rate your mood before and after. Gradually increase activity as momentum builds. The goal is engagement, not enjoyment → mood follows action.

02 Cognitive Restructuring

Depression distorts thinking toward negativity, hopelessness, and self-criticism. Identify automatic negative thoughts, examine the evidence for and against them, and generate a more balanced perspective. Common distortions include all-or-nothing thinking, mind-reading, catastrophizing, and personalization.

03 Sleep Hygiene

Depression disrupts sleep, and poor sleep worsens depression. Maintain consistent wake/sleep times (even weekends), remove screens 60 minutes before bed, avoid napping after 3pm, and create a cool, dark sleep environment. Get out of bed if you cannot sleep after 20 minutes and return only when sleepy.

04 Physical Activity

Exercise is one of the most *robustly supported interventions* for depression. Even 20–30 minutes of moderate activity (brisk walking, cycling) 3–4 times per week produces measurable improvements in mood, energy, and cognition. Start with what feels achievable → even 10 minutes counts.

05 Behavioural Experiments

Test depressive predictions. If your mind says "no one wants to hear from me," send one message and observe what actually happens. Collect *real-world evidence* to challenge the story depression tells.

06 Self-Compassion Practice

Depression is often accompanied by harsh self-criticism. Practice speaking to yourself as you would to a close friend in pain → *with warmth, not judgment*. Place a hand on your heart, acknowledge the difficulty ("this is hard"), and remind yourself that struggle is part of being human.

Lifestyle Pillars

- Social connection: isolation worsens depression → aim for one meaningful interaction per day
- Nutrition: regular, balanced meals stabilize mood and energy
- Sunlight: 20–30 minutes of morning light regulates circadian rhythms and serotonin
- Limit alcohol: it is a depressant and disrupts sleep architecture
- Routine: structure reduces the cognitive load that depression amplifies

When to Seek Additional Support

If symptoms persist for more than two weeks, significantly impair your functioning, or include thoughts of self-harm, please consult a psychologist, physician, or psychiatrist.

Helpful Resources

- Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI): cci.health.wa.gov.au — free CBT workbooks
- MoodGym: moodgym.com.au — online CBT program for depression
- Crisis line: 988 (Canada)
- Crisis Text Line: text HOME to 686868