



Understanding Depression and How It can be Managed

Nafisah Ogunbona*

***Correspondence to:** Nafisah Ogunbona, Nigeria.

Copyright

© 2023 **Nafisah Ogunbona**. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Received: 03 October 2023

Published: 31 October 2023

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.10066930.

What is depression?

Most people feel sad or depressed at times. Sometimes you might feel low for a number of reasons. People may say they are feeling depressed when they are feeling down, but this does not always mean they have depression.

When intense sadness, including feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness and helplessness, lasts for weeks or even months and interferes with your everyday life, then it might be something more than sadness.

Depression, also called clinical depression or major depressive disorder, is much more than simple unhappiness. It is a common and long-lasting mood disorder that affects how you think, feel and behave and can lead to a variety of emotional and physiological difficulties.

It differs from the everyday feelings of sadness in three main ways.

- Major depression is more intense.
- Major depression lasts longer (every day for two weeks or more).
- Major depression significantly interferes with everyday functioning

Symptoms of depression can include the following

Low mood/sadness lasting for two weeks or more, not getting any enjoyment out of life(relationships and activities), feeling hopeless, feeling tired or lacking energy, not being able to concentrate on everyday things like reading a book or watching TV, comfort eating, losing appetite or eating too much, sleeping more than usual or not sleeping at all, having suicidal thoughts, having thoughts about harming yourself.

Ways to manage depression

1. Stay in touch

Don't withdraw from life, socializing can improve your mood, keeping in touch with friends and family means you have someone to talk to when you feel low. So do connect with others. Call family and friends, visit and allow them to visit you.

2. Have a routine

When people feel down, they can get into poor sleep patterns, staying up late and sleeping during the day. Try to get up at your normal time and stick to your routine as much as possible. Not having a routine can affect your eating, try to carry on cooking and eating regular meals.

3. Talk to someone you trust for support

Many of us have learned to bottle things up inside us and try to ignore painful feelings. It can take a lot of courage to tell someone else how you are feeling or what you are finding hard. Doing this helps to improve your mood and keep the right perspective.

4. Keep moving

Our bodies and minds are connected so looking after ourselves physically also helps us prevent problems with our mental health. Moving our bodies with sports, gardening, walking, cleaning are great ways to improve our mental health and physical health. Exercise releases feel good hormones that reduce feelings of stress and anger. It also helps us feel better about our bodies, It can improve our sleep too. If it involves other people like being part of a team, a class, that can also boost our mental health

5. Eat healthy food

Food and drink affect our bodies, brain and mood for good or for bad.

Sugary snacks and drinks(caffeine) can give us a temporary high of sense of comfort that can feel irresistible but they soon leave us feeling exhausted. A balance diet with lots of vegetables and fruit is essential for good physical and mental health.

How we eat is also important, having meals with other people can help to grow relationships with family, friends, partners and colleagues. This is really important in protecting everyone's mental health and preventing problems. Food can also get mixed up with our feelings, some people over eat or under eat when they have certain feelings. It may help to talk to a professional if we feel this way.

6. Be curious and open minded to new experiences

We can all get stuck in familiar ways, like how we spend our time and what we think about ourselves and the world. This can be self fulfilling, with our expectations influencing what actually happens, for good or for bad. For instance we might say to ourselves that things will never get better or I am worthless as a response to what others have said to us. It is helpful to notice these thoughts and try out new ones, such as I can change things for the better and there is so much I can do. Life can feel more interesting, lively and rewarding when we are open to trying new experiences and experimenting with how we do things.

7. Plan things to look forward to.

Life throws all sorts at us, and during hard times we feel hopeless and not have the energy to plan for the future. Things to look forward to, including fun activities can help us cope with difficult situations. Making plans for things we enjoy can increase our sense of hope, which is important for our mental health. Our plan could be anything from small pleasures, trip with family or friends, seeing your favorite show, sports team, learn something new. Whether it is small or big one the important thing is to plan it. Decide what you'll do, when and with who. It is essential you follow your plan and repeat.

8. Breathing exercises can help your mind and help your mind and body to get control of a difficult situation. They only take a few minutes to do and can help you manage strong emotions and reduce stress.

Concentrate on your breathing

Take a couple of minutes to concentrate on how you breathe. You might notice that your breathing comes from the top of your chest. When we are stressed, tired or feeling anxious we tend to take quick, shallow breaths.

When we are relaxed we take slower and calmer breaths. This also helps us to feel calmer. More oxygen helps your body and brain function better. Changing how you feel physically can change how you feel mentally. Calming the physical feeling of anxiety - with deep breaths - can help to relieve an anxious mind.

Breathing techniques

Practice these tips to help you take a moment and breathe:

Sit in a comfortable and supportive chair.

Put one hand on your chest and the other hand on your tummy.

Breathe as you would normally, but notice where your breath is coming from in your body.

Concentrate on taking a deep breath and filling your lungs - notice how your tummy rises and falls.

As you get used to taking deep breaths, try holding your breath for a count of 4 and then exhaling to a count of 6 - this will encourage you to take deeper breaths.

When taking a deep breath it's important to focus on the exhale.

As you get better at taking deep breaths, try working towards exhaling for 9 seconds and inhaling for 7.

Being present When your mind feels overloaded with thoughts or stress, it helps to pay attention to what's around you. Focus on what's going on around you. This could be the people walking past or the colour of the sky. Notice the colours, the textures, even the smells and sounds around you. This can help to bring you back into the moment.

Focus on your feelings

Take a moment to focus on your feelings at various points during the day. This gives you time and space to acknowledge your feelings.

Even noticing how you are feeling can change how you feel. It's possible to change your feelings about a situation, even when things seem difficult.

The more you practice noticing your feelings, the better you'll get. The important thing is to focus on the feeling without judgement, just kindness.

Pay attention to your walk

If possible, when you're feeling stressed, go for a walk for a minute or two. Focus on each step that you take. Concentrate on how it feels to bring your foot down and then up again.

Notice the movement of your body, the swing of your arms, and all the sensations and sounds you experience as you walk. It might sound odd, but this can help to focus you on the moment.

Relaxation tips

Relaxing gives your mind and body time to recover from the stresses of everyday life. Breathing techniques and remembering to be in the present moment can help.

Fit things into your day that help you unwind.

This could be:

- going for a walk
- being in nature
- contact with friends
- yoga
- running
- reading
- activities you enjoy

Make a conscious effort to do something relaxing every day. Even 10 minutes of pleasurable activity can help you manage stress better. The more pauses you can build into your day the calmer you'll feel.

It can help to have a specific place where you go to relax. This can be your bedroom, bathroom, the garden shed or a small corner in the compound. It should be somewhere you feel comfortable and secure

Activities with other people to improve mental health

Social contact and being active in your community can improve your mental health.

Try to:

meet more people

build a network of friends

get involved in activities

It can take courage to meet new people, but it can make a big difference in how you feel.

Get started

Think about the hobbies you enjoy or the things you have always wanted to try. Doing something you enjoy will help you feel well. Learning something new can be good for your confidence.

Helping others

By supporting and helping others, you are more likely to feel good about yourself.

There are lots of ways to help others, including:

volunteering

visiting an elderly neighbour who lives alone

helping a friend with work in their garden or house.

Keep it going

It's important to try to spend time with others. Seek out company not only when you need it but as part of your daily life.

Try to make a regular arrangement to meet friends or family. It will be something to look forward to and will enrich your life over time.

10. Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to whatever is happening in the present moment and experiencing it without judgement.

Anyone can practice mindfulness. It is easy to fit into your day. You can do it 1 minute at a time.

Benefits of mindfulness

Being aware of the present moment can help you enjoy the world around you more.

Mindfulness helps you:

focus on the present and what's happening right at this moment

weaken old and unhelpful thinking habits

How to be more mindful

Taking notice of your thoughts, feelings, sensations and the world around you is the first step to being more mindful.

Ways you can be more mindful on a daily basis:

Notice the everyday, such as the air you breathe and the food you eat.

Pick the same time each day when you can be aware of the world around you.

Try something new like sitting in a different seat in meetings.

Gentle walking or yoga can help you cope if you have an over-busy mind.

Name thoughts and feelings - for example, 'this is anxiety'.

Free yourself from thinking constantly about the past and future.

