



## Ways to overcome depression and low mood

While there is no quick fix or one-size-fits-all for overcoming depression, the following tips can help you manage depression so it does not manage you.

1. **Beware of rumination.** The word "ruminate" derives from the Latin meaning for chewing cud, a less than appetizing process in which cattle grind up, swallow, then regurgitate and rechew their feed. In the human realm, ruminators analyze an issue at length (think “emotional vomiting.”). Many ruminators remain in a depressive rut because their negative outlook hinders their problem-solving ability. It may be that ruminating is so normal to you that it feels too difficult to stop.

### Action plan:

- The first step is to notice that you are thinking negatively. When, how often, and what about.
- Remind yourself that rumination does not increase psychological insight.
- Start to push those thoughts away and replace them with more positive thoughts, plans or interests.
- Take small actions toward problem-solving. If you can change something, do it, if it something you can't change, accept this.
- Reframe negative perceptions of events and high expectations of others.
- Let go of unhealthy or unattainable goals and develop multiple sources of social support.

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**2. Focus on what you're doing right.** As rough as your life is right now, you haven't fallen off the edge, and this is not just by chance. Key is to remember that humans are remarkably resilient and capable. Because depression can cloud your judgment, it can be tempting to overemphasise the negative aspects of situations, while discounting the positives.

**Action plan:** At the end of the day, write down three things you did well. No need to overthink this, and no act of taking the high road is too small. For example, "When my coworker emailed the budget proposal, he forgot to cite a source. Rather than get upset, I spent two minutes researching the answer and added the information myself."

**3. Resist the urge to live in the past.** Time spent reliving, rewriting and recreating the past is like purchasing a one-way ticket to the dark depths of despair. This insidious mental habit is as much a threat to emotional wellbeing as any. Self-loathing or blaming others will not get you on the right side of feeling better, any more than believing the answer is found at the bottom of a bottle of Jack Daniels. You cannot *do* life differently if you don't change your thought process.

**Action plan:** Commit to a new way of thinking and you will commit to a new way of being. Past regrets serve one purpose and that is to rob you of your resolve to do things differently in the present.

**4. Leave the future where it belongs.** Just as the living in the past leads to depression, fearing or worrying about the future contributes to anxiety. Daily stress and

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frustration are primarily caused by persistent feelings of overwhelm caused by uncertainty. Chronic worriers tend to catastrophize and before you know it, every headache is a brain tumor, and every romantic rejection is proof that you're fated for a life of solitude.

**Action plan:** Have faith in uncertainty, and in life. A good way to practice is by cultivating a state of mindfulness each and every day. When you learn to intentionally redirect your mind to what is happening in the here and now, you'll increase your mental energy reserves so you can spend more time on enjoyable tasks.

**5. Incorporate structure into every day.** A lack of scheduled activities and inconsistent routines can increase feelings of helplessness and a loss of control over the direction of your life. Adding a plan to your day can help you regain that sense of control and decrease the feeling that you're just a passive participant in life.

**Action plan:** The following guide may help you develop structure and assess whether your time is well-spent based upon your productivity and moods. On a paper or in a text document, make five columns:

1. Time of day:

- Early morning (waking time until 10am)
- Late morning (10am—12pm)
- Early afternoon (12pm—3pm)
- Late afternoon (3pm—5pm)

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- Evening (5pm—8 pm)
- Night (8pm until bedtime)

2. What you plan to do (complete the night before)

3. What you actually did (if different from your plans)

4. How you felt about what you did (rate your mood on a scale of 1-10)

5. Situations and thoughts which may have negatively affected your mood. Fill out at end of day. Adjust and revise accordingly.

**6. Remember there are very few victims in this world.** Despite your childhood and life experiences, you are responsible for your choices as an adult. While trauma and tragedy may have informed your worldview and your ability to trust others, nothing good comes out of seeing yourself as a victim (even if you were).

**Action plan:** Take responsibility for your life. Switch the dial from victim to survivor and revel in feelings of strength and empowerment. Rather than seek retribution over those who have wronged you, seek redemption. Refuse to wallow in self-pity and focus on comforting others. After all, there is always someone out there fighting a battle greater than yours. The victim gives up at the first sign of struggle, while the survivor puts one foot in front of the other and keeps moving.

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**7. Find your social support network.** Humans are wired to connect. Chicago psychologist John Cacioppo, author of the book *Loneliness*, writes that "None of us is immune to feelings of isolation, any more than we are immune to feelings of hunger or physical pain."

**Action plan:** In short, reach out: Call a friend or family member and get together for coffee, or go for a hike, or meet up at a park. Even small steps like volunteering and smiling at strangers make a difference. In long, open up your life.

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