

COPING WITH DEPRESSION

BOOKLET 2

Getting Active

This booklet was produced by the Clinical Psychology Service of Northampton Healthcare Community [NHS] Trust. It forms part of a series of booklets that are designed to provide people with information that will reassure, advise and encourage them.

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In this booklet we explain the crucial role of increasing activity in helping to alleviate depression. When someone is depressed their activity level decreases. This leads to further feelings of guilt and inadequacy which deepen the depression. This booklet helps you fight this by the following methods:

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BEHAVIOURAL SELF-HELP

Increasing Activity Levels

The ideas in this booklet have been developed by psychologists and psychiatrists to help people who are depressed. Whether you are only mildly depressed or quite severely depressed these methods can be *very effective*.

REMEMBER

Helping yourself out of a depression and preventing depression again *is a skill* that can be learned. It takes a lot of effort and *you must persevere* as you have to when learning any new skill.

Perhaps think about it as similar to learning a new language - you have to:

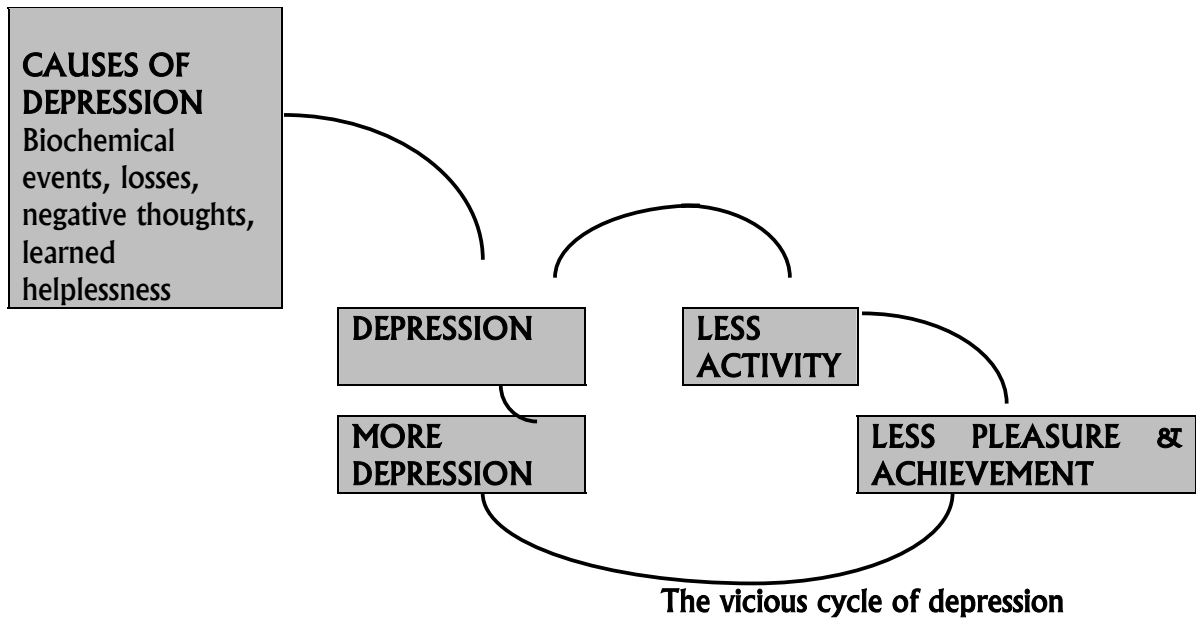
- Acquire new information or ideas [often from a book in the first place]
- Practice the information or ideas in your head - again and again and again
- Try out the information or ideas in real life

There has been much research carried out over the last 20 years - both in the USA and in Europe, that shows that these methods can be effective

WHY IS ACTIVITY SO IMPORTANT ?

What happens to Activity Levels when Someone Gets Depressed ?

Depression slows you down both mentally and physically. Interrupted sleeping and eating patterns, feelings of utter fatigue and futility may make the prospect of attempting any activity unpleasant and pointless. So you do less. However, you may then blame yourself for doing less and criticise yourself for being lazy or irresponsible. You come to believe that you can do nothing and that you will never feel any better, and these thoughts make you feel more worthless, unhappy, futile, and so deepen the depression. Thus a vicious cycle can be set as shown overleaf.



This booklet leads you through a way of breaking into this vicious cycle by increasing your activity levels

Feelings of fatigue and futility may make the prospect of attempting to “help yourself” using these booklets impossible. What follows is a simple, gentle exercise that might seem easier to cope with. Don’t worry about the other booklets for now, just give this single exercise a try:

KEEPING AN ACTIVITY DIARY

What’s the point of the exercise ?

When you suffer from depression doing any activity can become an effort and so you begin to do less. This may then lead to upsetting thoughts of laziness and inadequacy which may then deepen the feelings of depression. The point of this exercise is to write down the activities you are managing to do, however simple, without these upsetting thoughts of self-blame.

- Look at one of the “Activity Diary” sheets provided
- In the **TIME** Column:

Split up your day from roughly the time you get up to when you go to bed into hour long periods. As soon as you can after the hour-long period ends write it down in the **TIME** column

- In the **ACTIVITY** column:

Write briefly what you did in that hour. Try not to write “nothing” here. You will always be doing something. For example it might have been “washing up the breakfast things”; “Watching television”; “Sleeping” or “Looking out of the window, brooding”.

- In the **RATINGS** column:

Firstly, think about how much pleasure, however small, you felt whilst doing the activity. Give the degree of pleasure a number rating from the scale below and enter this in the final column by writing “P = ”

0	1	2	3	4	5
None at all					Very much

Now think about how much of an achievement it was managing to do this activity *given how you felt at the time*? Even if you felt no pleasure you may feel some satisfaction or achievement at having done the activity. For example you may think “Well, that wasn’t much fun, but at least I’ve done it, got it out of the way”. Give the degree of achievement a number rating from the following scale and also enter this in the final column by writing “A = ”.

0	1	2	3	4	5
None at all					Very much

Don’t wait until the end of the day to fill in ratings of **Pleasure** and **Achievement**. Try to fill in all three columns together throughout the day whilst your memories of the activities and any feelings of pleasure or satisfaction are fresh.

To help you start your own activities diary look at the example below. Perhaps divide up the time as is suggested here but fill in your own activities and ratings of **P** and **A**.

TIME	ACTIVITIES	RATING
09.00AM-10.00 AM	Watched “Kilroy” on TV	A = 0 P = 1
10.00AM-11.00 AM	Washed up breakfast dishes	A = 1 P = 0
11.00AM-12.00 PM	Did some of crossword in newspaper	A = 1 P = 0
12.00PM-01.00PM	Dozed off in front of TV	A = 0 P = 1
	Thought about what to do	A = 0

01.00PM-02.00PM	Washed hair Made and ate sandwich	P = 0 A = 2 P = 0 A = 1 P = 1
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Try to keep this activity diary for 3 or 4 days in a row if you can. Don't worry if you miss a day out, [maybe do an extra day at the end to make up].

Writing things down like this is usually *very helpful* - it helps you get your thoughts clear *and* lets you *see* what progress you are making.

THERE REALLY IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO

Thoughts of futility often accompany depression. It may seem to you that nothing you do makes you feel better. Have a look through the activities diary. Many of the activities may have left you feeling frustrated but notice occasions on which the values of **Achievement** and **Pleasure** rise above zero. There are still activities which do give you some feeling of pleasure or achievement, however small. *There are things you can do to make you feel better, even if only slightly.* Try to prove this point to yourself by attempting the following:

- On a clean page or sheet of paper make a list of potentially pleasant activities.

This task may seem daunting, particularly if concentrating is presently difficult. Also it is characteristic of depression that activities that used to be the most enjoyable are now the ones that are the most unbearable to think about.

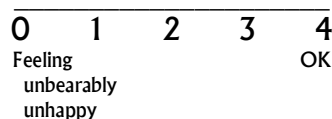
If you are having difficulty then try using the two *“Pleasant Activities Help Sheet”* provided.

- Choose just three activities that you could possibly do over the next week. Fix a time for each over the next week.

If you think it would be helpful then tell someone close to you of your plans so that they can encourage, but not pressurise you, into carrying them out.

- Monitor how bad you feel before, during and immediately after the activity

Do this by rating your mood at those times on a scale like the one shown here:



After the week is over look at the mood ratings that you have recorded.

The purpose of this is to prove to yourself that doing these activities makes you feel a bit better than if you had not done them.

“OUT OF THE BLUE” UNHAPPINESS

In contrast to these slight lifts in mood you may be only too aware of when you feel particularly bad, tearful, sad, lethargic, perhaps almost suicidal. These experiences can also be frightening since they may occur seemingly without warning. However, this is often not the case. *Many of these periods do not come “out of the blue” even if that it sometimes what it feels like.* To help persuade you that this is true think about heavy smokers who suddenly have immense cravings for a cigarette. They can pick out certain “danger zones” throughout their daily routine when these apparently “out of the blue” cravings occur more frequently and more intensely. Examples of such danger zones might be periods of boredom or anxiety; whilst in the pub; after dinner; or simply when people around them are smoking. Similarly in people who are suffering from depression there will be certain situations or “danger zones” or triggers in which their feelings of misery and hopelessness intensify. Examples of such triggers might be being alone, seeing other people [apparently] happy, any criticism [however slight], certain types of conversation [jobs, money, relationships].

- Look at the sheet provided entitled “Personal Triggers”. Over the next few days note down under the example given in the first column both the time and place when these periods of particular unhappiness occur.
- Look at the entries in the first column. Note down below any times, people or places that commonly occur.

You can now begin to help yourself: You may be able to avoid certain people or places that often trigger unhappiness. If this direct avoidance is not possible then you may be able to alter the situation slightly such as buying a new record to listen to when you are alone at night.

From this exercise you may now be aware that some periods of particularly intense depression are triggers. However, you have probably noted down some periods for which there was no apparent trigger of which you may be unaware, such as hormonal changes or tiredness. Finally, depression can be a habit. For people who suffer from depression feeling unhappy becomes the usual state. They can develop a “depressed disposition” which means that feelings of depression take over if there are no other stronger emotions present to keep them out of the way.

BEHAVIOURAL SELF-HELP : INCREASING YOUR ACTIVITY LEVEL

12. For the easiest short-term target divide this up into small precise jobs
13. Choose one of these precise jobs and have a clear mental picture of what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.
- Once you have finished this job then pause and tick it off your list with satisfaction
14. Reward yourself for finishing jobs and completing targets [*See below*]

REWARDING YOURSELF

The reward can be anything - provided it is something that pleases you. For example, after cleaning the bath you might allow yourself 10 minutes flipping through a catalogue and a cup of coffee. Look back through the list of suggested pleasant activities, or through your *Activities Diary* for ideas of rewards.

Rewarding yourself in this way is important since you are setting up associations in your mind between increasing activity and experiencing feelings of enjoyment. It therefore increases the chances of continuing to be more active and breaking the vicious circle of inactivity and feelings of depression.

This process can be illustrated with an example:

Example 1: TIDYING THE HOUSE:

NEGATIVE THOUGHT: “The house is a complete mess, look where my family have to live”

POSITIVE STATEMENT: “Think how pleased they will be to see the house becoming tidier this week”

- ***Separate Areas:*** a. floors;
- b. sinks/toilets/bath;
- c. dusting
- ***Create Targets:***

AREA	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
FLOORS	Hoover carpets	Change tile in kitchen floor
	Wash floor tiles	
SINKS	Clean sinks	Phone plumber

BATH	Clean bath	
TOILETS	Clean toilets	Buy more cleaning gloves
DUSTING	Each room: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lounge • bedrooms • bathroom Clean kitchen surfaces	

- *Take the easiest short-term target: “clean sinks” and divide it up into small precise jobs*

CLEAN SINKS:

Collect cleaner, gloves
Clean kitchen sink
Clean sink in toilet
Clean sink in bathroom
Clean sink in main bedroom

- *Tick these off the list as you do them*
- *Reward yourself after doing each job*

DO NOT FEEL GUILTY IF YOU FAIL ANY JOB

OTHER WAYS TO COPE WITH TASKS

1. Concentration Aids:

Poor concentration is one of the symptoms of depression. This can lead to paralysing indecision even about everyday activities such as getting dressed or shopping for supper. This difficulty in thinking straight will ease as your depression lifts. In the meantime try to make allowances for it. Make lists for shopping and housework and place reminders around the house for calls you might have to make.

2. Starting the Day:

Timetabling: You may well find that getting out of bed to start the day is a major hurdle. Due to biological changes it is usual for a person with depression to feel worse in the morning than in the evening. Add to this the prospect of an empty day or mountains of chores stretching ahead,

together with tiredness from a disturbed night. All this can make getting out of a warm bed very difficult.

Putting structure into the day ahead can make it seem much more manageable. Try timetabling your day:

A sample timetable for a morning follows over the page. Treat the times as approximate and schedule your own activities. Mundane activities can seem difficult when you are depressed so remember to timetable these. Also reserve “slots” on the timetable for rewarding, pleasurable activities and treat these as valuable. Such times are *very important* in increasing your activity level which will in turn help combat the depression. A good option is physical exercise which has been shown to be effective in lifting the mood of depressed people. Don’t choose anything too ambitious that you might previously have enjoyed such as squash. Try something gentle such as a stroll, or a short swim, or make a routine of doing 5 minutes of exercises at home. The physical activity can - and often does - change the way a depressed person feels and thinks.

Make yourself move those weary limbs - it will get easier.

Remember to rate activities for values of *Achievement* and *Pleasure* so that you can spot further rewarding activities.

SAMPLE TIMETABLE				
Time Intended	Activity	How I got on	Ratings	
			A	P
8.30 am	Get up and shower	Hard to get up slightly late	2	0
9.00 am	Make breakfast	Fine	3	1
9.15 am	Eat breakfast	Not very hungry	1	0
9.30 am	Walk to paper shop	Nice to be outside	2	2
9.45 am	Read paper	Hard to concentrate	1	2
10.30 am	Ring up my brother	He sounds cheerful	2	1
10.45 am	Start to prepare lunch	Dithered about what to eat	1	0

11.00 am	Coffee and do crossword	Concentration better now	2	2
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To begin with use the Timetable sheet provided and then continue onto sheets of A4 paper.



ACTIVITY DIARY SHEET

TIME	ACTIVITY	RATINGS

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[Once complete continue on A4 paper]

WRITING things down is usually very helpful . You can **see** the progress being made and it helps to keep your thoughts clear

PLEASANT ACTIVITIES HELP SHEET 1

A: Ask yourself the following seven questions:

- i. What types of things did I enjoy learning before I became depressed ?

[Sports, music, languages, practical skills, crafts ?]

- ii. What types of trips did I used to enjoy ?

[Seaside, mountains, towns ?]

- iii. What types of things might I enjoy if I had no inhibitions about them ?

[Painting, acting, playing the guitar, public speaking, dancing ?]

- iv. What did I enjoy doing alone ?

[Long walks, sewing, reading, watching "soaps" on TV?]

- v. What did I enjoy doing with others ?

[Phoning people, going out to the club, playing squash?]

vi. What did I enjoy doing that cost nothing ?

[Taking the dog for a walk, going to church, going to the library, visiting a museum ?]

vii. What did I enjoy doing that cost a few pounds ?

[Going to the cinema, hiring a video, going on a coach trip, buying a new record or cassette ?]

PLEASANT ACTIVITIES HELP SHEET 2

B: Look through the following list of suggestions:

Tick any of the suggested activities you think you could try and then fill in some details about the possible activity on the right.

Suggested Pleasant Activities [Tick if you could do this]	Details [Who, when, how long ?]
Visit a local friend Phone a relative or friend Discuss how I feel with someone close to me Take the children out Go for a car trip in the countryside Go for a long walk Sit in the garden or a local park Play badminton Listen to music on the radio Go to a favourite pub Read a newspaper or magazine Go to church	

<p>Visit a local place of interest</p> <p>Go to the local library [<i>e.g. Museum, Art Gallery, Castle</i>]</p> <p>Have a long, relaxing bath</p> <p>Potter round the garden</p> <p>Go for a bus/train trip</p> <p>Browse in a bookshop</p> <p>Plan a weekend break</p> <p>Go to a cinema</p> <p>Go swimming</p>	
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PERSONAL TRIGGERS	
DANGER ZONES/TRIGGERS	COPING TACTICS [Avoidance, change situation slightly]
<p>[e.g.] In bed Sunday morning</p> <p>[e.g.] Alone in evenings</p>	<p>Get up and go for a walk</p> <p>Buy new record to play when alone and it is quiet</p>

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