

# Tips to Combat Depression

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## Depression Defined

1. Depression is an emotional state in which there are extreme feelings of sadness, dejection, lack of worth, and emptiness. Depression is a term that people commonly use to refer to states involving sadness, dejection, lack of self-esteem, and lack of energy. In this overview, several types of depression are identified:
2. Depressed mood: An emotional state dominated by feelings of sadness, gloominess, or emptiness, which may be associated with lack of energy. This mood state may be a temporary response to an unhappy or stressful event, or it may be persistent.
3. Chronic low-grade depression, also known as dysthymia: Depressed mood is present most of the time for a period of two years, and is accompanied by changes in energy, appetite, or sleep, as well as low self-esteem and feelings of hopelessness. These symptoms cause distress and difficulty in functioning, but are not as severe as in major depression.
4. Major depression: Severe, persistent depressed mood and loss of interest or pleasure in normal activities, accompanied by decreased energy, changes in sleep and appetite, and feelings of guilt or hopelessness. These symptoms must be present for at least two weeks, cause significant distress, and be severe enough to interfere with functioning. If the depression is very severe, it may be accompanied by psychotic symptoms or by suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

## Symptoms

Anger and aggression

Irritability

Sadness

Withdrawal from family and friends

Change in eating habits (either too much or not enough)

Change in sleeping habits (too much or not enough)

Significant weight gain/loss (more than 5% of body weight in one month's time)

Apathy ("I don't care about \_\_\_\_\_.")

Chronic fatigue

Feelings of worthlessness

Sense of loneliness

Inappropriate guilt

Diminished capacity to think, focus, and/or concentrate.

Loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities (anhedonia).

Family history of depression, bipolar disorder, cyclothymia, or dysthymia.

Complete lack of emotion.

Giving away treasured items ("I don't need these anymore.")

Recurring thoughts of death or taking own life.  
Increase in alcohol and/or drug use.

### **12 Tips to Improve Your Mood**

1. Go easier on yourself. Think of mistakes as opportunities for learning, not as reasons for beating yourself up.
2. Relax! Try Yoga, meditation, deep breathing exercises, stretching, and visualization. Example: "Close your eyes. Sit comfortably in a chair. Relax your muscles. Breathe in deeply through your nose for 6 seconds. Hold the breath for 2 seconds. Blow air out through your mouth for 6 seconds. Repeat. If thoughts intrude, just watch them go by and focus on your breathing." These are critical skills that are useful throughout your life.
3. Exercise, exercise, exercise. It doesn't matter what kind. Just get out and do it. Walking, jogging, swimming, tennis, aerobics, Frisbee, soccer, anything. Exercise creates more endorphins in the body which leads directly to an elevated mood.
4. Focus on your EFFORTS not your outcomes. In other words, congratulate yourself for your small accomplishments, putting yourself out there every day, writing letters, emailing, revising the resume, etc. Regardless of the outcome, tell yourself you've done great work. You have given it your best this day.
5. Keep your focus to the present day. The past is gone and we can't change it. The future is not here and we can only prepare for that. Focus on giving each day your best effort. Wake up with a smile and refer back to it frequently all day long.
6. Talk to a friend. Ask them to just listen without any interrupting comments. Let them know that they are helping a great deal by simply listening without judgment.
7. Do not remain in bed any longer than 8 hours. Over-sleeping has been shown to increase depressed feelings.
8. Go outside for at least ½ hour between 11 am and 2 pm. The sunlight has been shown to have an antidepressant effect (even on moderately overcast days). Note: combine this with your exercise – go walking between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.
9. Abstain totally from alcohol and drugs which usually act as depressants to the central nervous system. Alcohol induces depression and prevents antidepressants from working effectively.
10. Increase the amount of Omega-3 fatty acids in your diet. Some research suggests increasing one's intake of EPA (one Omega-3 fatty acid) helps recovery from depression. Typical dosage should be in the range of 5000 mg per day divided into 3-4 doses daily. EPA can be found at any health food store.
11. Avoid use of products that contain aspartame (Equal or Nutrasweet). Studies show that people w/depression become more depressed when they use these products.
12. HELP OTHERS WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE THAN YOU! DONATE YOUR TIME AND SKILLS TO CHARITIES. HELP OTHERS.