

# Five Ways To Beat Depression

Depression is a common mental health condition that impacts people of all ages. There are several types of depression and there are various causes. Both clinical counseling and antidepressant medication are commonly used to treat depression. While depression can be mild, moderate, or severe in degree, the pain it causes is real, and treatment should be sought. In addition to treatment, there are numerous practical lifestyle options available to help prevent or address depression.

## 1. Get Regular Physical Exercise

Regular exercise has well-documented benefits for lowering levels of depression, stress, and anxiety. Current exercise guideline for most adults is 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. For example, that breaks down to 30 minutes of walking 5 times per week. Exercising with another person adds a beneficial social support element that can increase accountability to getting your exercise done and helps to pass the time. While the 150 minutes of moderate exercise guideline is usually associated with heart health, it can also help keep a healthy weight and boost your mood. Remember, pretty much anything that is good for your heart is also good for your brain and vice versa. For more information search 'exercise' on the American Heart Association's website ([www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)).

## 2. Improve Your Diet

When depressed, some people lose their appetite and lose weight while others can't seem to stop eating. People often experience a carbohydrate craving during periods of depression and short-term mood enhancement with food is common. Unfortunately, emotional eating leads to more mood swings and often leads to weight gain. Research in recent years has increasingly shown the impact on mood of the quality of one's food intake. For example, the typical American diet has been shown to more likely lead to worse mental health in addition to obesity. Diets rich in vegetables, nuts, fish, lean protein, olive oil, and complex carbohydrates (food that is vitamin and mineral rich and has higher fiber and omega-3's) lead to a lower risk of depression. For more information, do a web search on the 'Mediterranean diet.' Note this isn't a commercial diet, but is more of a mindset and lifestyle.

## 3. Actively Cultivate Healthy Thinking

Depression is often characterized by negative thinking about the past, oneself, and the future. Thinking and mood are highly interconnected. *Proverbs 23:7a* says, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." *Perfectionism and critical self-talk fill our minds with judgment* "shoulds, oughts, and musts." Ultimately, our goal should be that, over time, our self-talk will sound more like the voice of Jesus as we develop the mind of Christ (*1 Corinthians 2:16*). For example, consider this self-talk: "You're a failure and everyone wishes you weren't even around." Does that sound like the voice of Jesus or the voice of the accuser, our adversary Satan? Remember even when the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, His voice is from a holy God who loves us deeply and wants us to be close to him (*Proverbs 3:11-12*). To learn more about healthy self-talk, search the ACCFS website ([www.accounseling.org](http://www.accounseling.org)) for 'Truth Talk' or the [Learning To Tell Myself the Truth](#) workbook.

## 4. Get Involved to Socially Connect

Depression is isolating. It can feel very difficult for individuals dealing with depression to be in social situations like church or getting together with friends. However, social support and interpersonal relationships are key to breaking the isolation. Often, individuals dealing with depression have a type of thinking distortion called "mind-reading" in which they imagine other people are judging them negatively. In addition, depression often interferes with an individual's concentration and ability to keep up with conversations and leads them to feel "out of it" or easily overwhelmed.

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Therefore, it becomes easier to avoid social gatherings. Unfortunately, the more one stays away from social gatherings, the more one feels distant and like they aren't wanted or loved by the people in the group. Remember it isn't necessary for an individual who is depressed to share all their private struggles with everyone. However, having a key group of support people to rely on is a great benefit. For more information, search the ACCFS website for 'Helping Someone with Depression.'

## 5. Spiritual Grounding

In times of depression, it is easy to start to view God through the lenses of depression instead of who He actually is. That is, we project onto God how we feel about ourselves in depression. So, if I feel unlovable and unworthy of kindness because I am depressed, then that is how God must see me. However, that projection is not true. God's love for us is steady and constant through the ups and downs of life (*Romans 8:38-39*). We can also tend to view the promises of Scripture as applying only to others, but verses about judgement as applying only to us. To challenge this, think about someone in your life who you love. If he or she is sick or hurting in some way, how do you feel toward them? You love them! In fact, your heart hurts for them and your desire to help them goes up! However, depression tends to cloud our minds and we falsely believe that when we are struggling, people's love for us will go down. Remember God's love for us far exceeds the love we have for each other as human beings. For a helpful tool to help you focus on the promises of Scripture, search the ACCFS website for 'Comforting Scriptures for Times of Depression and Struggle.'