



Overcoming Depression

by Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

44 Therapeutic Activities to Bring Happiness
and Fulfillment Back into Your Life

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Fulfillment Back into Your Life

Between Sessions Resources
Norwalk, CT, USA

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Disclaimer: This book is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. If you are experiencing serious symptoms or problems in your life, you should seek the help of an experienced mental health professional.

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About the Author

Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D., is a prolific author of self-help books and the inventor of more than 100 therapeutic games. Dr. Shapiro is known for his practical approach to helping others. He has written workbooks, storybooks, card games, board games, and smartphone apps. His interests and expertise cover a broad range of issues, from providing parents with lifesaving information in *The Baby Emergency Handbook* to reducing the incidence of suicide in the military with the award-winning app *Operation Reach Out*. His work has been translated into 29 languages.

About the Series

Between Sessions Resources publishes a variety of worksheets and other tools designed to be used as therapeutic homework. The *Overcoming Depression* workbook is one of a series of assignment books designed to help people practice the psychological skills they learn in therapy.

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Introduction

Overcoming Depression

Depression is often called the “common cold” of mental health problems. Almost all of us experience at least a mild depression from time to time and an estimated one-third of adults will experience a significant depression in their lifetime.

There are many types of depression. A person with Persistent Depressive Disorder will be depressed for at least two years and will have episodes of major depression mixed with less severe symptoms. Seasonal Affective Disorder comes during the winter months when there is less sunlight and is usually alleviated in the spring, but its impact during the winter months cannot be underestimated. Bipolar Disorder is characterized by depression combined with periodic highs, which can include feelings of euphoria and also irritability. Depression is frequently found with other problems as well, including addictions, marital problems, and work-related stress.

If you are depressed, your diagnosis will depend on how many symptoms you are experiencing and how long they last. Symptoms of depression include:

- Depressed mood, sadness, or an “empty” feeling
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you once enjoyed
- Significant weight loss when not dieting or significant weight gain
- Inability to sleep or excessive sleeping
- Restlessness or irritation
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Difficulty thinking or concentrating or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide* with or without a specific plan

*Important: If you are thinking about suicide, even if it is only once in a while, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline immediately. Their counselors are available 24/7/365 with confidential help and they will connect you to a network of services across the country. Call 1-800-273-8255 or visit their website <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>.

What This Workbook Can Do for You

This workbook is designed to be used as part of your treatment with a psychotherapist or counselor. While you might find the worksheets are helpful at relieving your depression without additional help, seeing a qualified therapist or counselor will help you make much quicker progress in overcoming your depression. Depression can be complicated and can often be accompanied by other kinds of problems, such as anxiety disorders, which will need different kinds of treatment. A professional therapist or counselor will help you focus on the things you can do to get both immediate and long-term relief from your depression.

The standard treatment for depression involves teaching clients specific psychological skills to stop the downward spiral of unhappiness, negativism, and self-defeating behaviors. The worksheets in this book are based on the most recent thinking in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, which is considered to be the “gold standard” in the treatment of depression.

The skills and behaviors you will learn in this workbook can quite literally change the way your brain works. We have hundreds of studies that show us that when people practice certain behaviors, the biochemicals in their brain change. These activities can increase the biochemicals that we associate with a sense of well-being, including serotonin (calmness and contentment), oxytocin (love and connection to others), dopamine (pleasure), and endorphins (relaxation and positive feelings). As you practice the exercises in this workbook, you will be actively stimulating these important biochemicals.

Beyond Depression: Why Not Be Happy?

In the last twenty years, psychologists have started looking beyond just treating the symptoms of depression and have also focused their treatment on techniques that can help people find a happier and more fulfilling life. Many of the worksheets in this workbook are derived from research on why some people seem to be happier than others, and you may be surprised at how little it takes to make this happen.

Researchers tell us that we all have a “set point” for happiness, a predisposition toward a specific point on a continuum between being happy or depressed. In other words, you were born with a predisposition toward a certain level of happiness, just as you were born with a predisposition to be a certain weight. But like with your weight, your behavior can make a difference in your happiness. When you learn to practice a “diet” of behaviors that increase happiness, you can defy your genetic predisposition as well as your particular life circumstances. It doesn’t matter whether you are rich or poor, tall or short, married or single, you always have it in your power to be happy.

How to Use This Workbook

The forty-four exercises in this workbook are organized into seven sections.

Understanding Your Depression

The worksheets in this section will help you understand the reasons that you are depressed and will help motivate you to change. Depression affects different people in different ways, and you may have problems caused by your depression that you attribute to other things in your life. Understanding your depression will help you focus on the specific things you can do to feel better sooner.

Increasing Positive Feelings

The worksheets in this section will focus you on activities that can lift your mood and develop the “habit of happiness.” You may have been depressed for so long that you have forgotten what it feels like to be happy and have positive feelings about yourself and others. Fortunately, there are relatively simple ways to lift your mood; once you incorporate these into your daily life, you might start to feel happier in just a few weeks.

New Ways to Think

For nearly fifty years we’ve known that changing the way you think can change the way that you feel. The worksheets in this section will help you understand how your irrational thinking can make your depression worse, how giving up negative judgments about others can make you feel better about yourself, and how you can develop a more nurturing inner voice.

New Ways to Act

Overcoming depression takes work. But when you commit yourself to making daily changes in your life, you can learn to control your emotions rather than having them control you. Some of the changes that will help your depression involve basic lifestyle habits, like making sure you eat nutritious meals and get enough sleep. Other activities ask you to commit yourself to doing things you enjoy and acting with kindness and compassion toward others. You may be surprised how little changes in your daily behavior can make a big difference in how you feel.

Coping with Stress and Difficult Feelings

Sometimes life is very hard. You might lose your job, get a divorce, or even suffer from the loss of a loved one. There are many everyday things that can cause you to feel sadness and stress as well, but these things don’t have to make you depressed. This section teaches you techniques to tolerate difficult times and develop habits that will make you more resilient even when times are tough.

Connecting to Others

People who are depressed tend to isolate themselves and even hide their problems from those who care about them. The worksheets in this section will help you fight the instinct to “go it alone” and help you realize that there are many people in your life who can help you in overcoming your depression.

Creating a Permanent Change

Many people suffer from symptoms of depression throughout their lifetime, but this can stop! Of course, you will be sad and even unhappy at times—that is all part of being human—but you can learn to recognize when normal stresses and emotions turn into needless suffering. The worksheets in this section will help you identify the things that have helped you overcome your depression, help you recognize the things that can cause setbacks, and help you monitor any medications that you are taking for your depression.

There is no right or wrong place to start this workbook. All of the techniques in this book will be helpful. If you are in therapy for your depression, you should discuss where to start with your therapist or counselor. He or she might feel that there are some specific things you can do that will have the most immediate impact.

Above all, it is important to be patient with yourself and persist in using these techniques even though they may at times be difficult. The treatment of depression, or any mental health problem for that matter, can quite literally change the way your brain works, but this can take some time.

We wish you the best in working to overcome your depression. If you are looking for additional resources, we recommend using the website of the American Association for Anxiety and Depression, which can be found at <https://www.adaa.org/>.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR DEPRESSION

Causes of Depression

There are many causes of depression, and most of the time more than one factor contributes to a person's depression. Use this worksheet to think about some of the factors that may have contributed to your depression.

Directions: For each of the categories below, list things you feel have affected you. Leave the section blank if you don't think it is relevant.

1. Environment

Negative family or social environments such as poverty, hunger, abuse, crime, conflict, violence, instability, unsanitary conditions, or neglect can contribute to depression. List any environmental factors that might be a factor in your depression.

2. Personality type

Some personality types are more vulnerable to depression. These include people who are unrealistic, negative, highly self-critical, overly passive or dependent, or highly anxious. Describe your personality.

3. Physical illness

Severe or long-term illness can drain people of their physical and emotional energy, or even limit their ability to function. These factors can contribute to a depressed mood. List any significant illnesses you have had in the last year.

4. Medication

While medication is designed to help people feel better, some medications can actually cause depression or make it worse. List all the medications you have taken in the last year.

5. Biochemistry

Hormone changes, exercise, diet, and even the change in seasons can cause imbalances in your brain chemistry. List anything in your life that may affect your brain chemistry.

6. Genetics

A tendency toward depression can run families. Sometimes these genetic factors are triggered early in life, and sometimes much later. List any family members you know who have suffered from depression.

7. Drugs and alcohol

Drugs and alcohol can cause chemical changes in the brain that affect your mood. Describe your drug and alcohol use.

Symptoms of Depression

Depression takes many forms, including ones that may not seem related to a depressed mood. Identifying your most troubling symptoms can help you focus on what you need to do to feel better.

This is a list of common symptoms of depression. Rate each symptom you are currently experiencing with a number from 0 to 3, where:

0 = never 1 = occasionally 2 = frequently 3 = most of the time

- _____ Trouble sleeping
- _____ Unhappiness
- _____ Constant feelings of sadness
- _____ Significant weight change
- _____ Reckless behavior
- _____ Drug or alcohol abuse
- _____ Feeling that nothing in your life is important or worthwhile
- _____ Withdrawal from friends and family
- _____ Feeling helpless
- _____ Feeling hopeless much of the time
- _____ Constant boredom
- _____ Skipping classes often
- _____ Fear of death
- _____ Increased irritability
- _____ No interest in activities that used to give you pleasure
- _____ Excessive use of drugs, alcohol, caffeine
- _____ Feeling worthless
- _____ Trouble focusing
- _____ Unexplained aches and pains
- _____ Desire to be alone
- _____ Irritation and anger
- _____ Difficulty making decisions
- _____ Negative attitude
- _____ Frequent crying
- _____ Strong feelings of guilt

- _____ Feeling like a failure
- _____ The desire to hurt yourself
- _____ Suicidal thoughts
- _____ Disappointment in yourself
- _____ Physical or verbal aggression toward others
- _____ Forgetfulness
- _____ Conflicts with family, friends, and/or coworkers
- _____ Withdrawal
- _____ A lack of interest in personal hygiene
- _____ Constant restlessness

1. Which of these symptoms do you feel affect you the most?

2. Describe anything else you have experienced that you think may be a symptom of depression.

3. When would you say you first started to have symptoms of depression?

4. What was going on in your life at that time?

Does Your Depression Physically Hurt?

Depression often hurts physically as well as emotionally. That’s because the same biochemicals that influence your mood also affect how your body interprets pain.

If you are experiencing any of the following health issues, it could be linked to your depression. It is important to address these physical symptoms, along with your depression.

- Headaches (for those who experience migraines, these may be worse)
- Back pain
- Muscle aches and joint pain
- Digestive problems (nausea, stomachache, diarrhea, constipation)
- Exhaustion and fatigue (regardless of sleep)
- Sleeping problems (insomnia or oversleeping)
- Change in appetite or weight
- Dizziness or lightheadedness

For the next week, keep track of any physical symptoms you experience, and rate each on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the worst.

Date and time	Symptom	First occurrence or recurring	Rating

Motivating Yourself to Change

Some of the most debilitating symptoms of depression are lethargy, hopelessness, and a sense that things will never get better.

So how are you going to motivate yourself to do the assignments in this workbook? Let's face it, change is not easy. But research on motivation tells us that there are many techniques that can help. Read through the ten motivation tips below and then go back and rate each as to whether you think it would be helpful for you to use to make changes to overcome your depression. Rate each technique on a seven-point scale, where 1 = I don't think this would be helpful and 7 = I think this would be very helpful. Choose at least three motivational techniques to help you focus on overcoming your depression, and remind yourself of these techniques at the start of each day.

_____ 1. Schedule your assignments.

Pick a time each day to work on a therapy assignment. Write it down, just like you would any important appointment and do your best to do this work at the appointed time. Try and work on overcoming your depression every day!

_____ 2. Reward yourself when you are done with an assignment.

You already know that people (or animals) will be more likely to do something when they experience a reward immediately after doing something new or difficult. Think of some ways you can reward yourself after you do something that helps you overcome your depression.

_____ 3. Sign a contract and commit to it.

Contracts are surprisingly helpful when it comes to making changes in your life. See page 56 for a contract you can sign to help you achieve your goals.

_____ 4. Share what you are doing with people you know.

One of the most effective motivators for change is to tell a select group of friends and family about what you are trying to do. You don't have to confide everything about your problem if you don't want to, but just let these people know that you are working on a specific aspect of your life and ask for their support. It goes without saying that you should only ask for support from people who can give it to you. Use the activity *Building Your Support System* (page 88) to help you identify people who can help you overcome your depression.

_____5. Set a goal.

Set a tangible behavior goal for yourself. You might also wish to identify the sub-goals or steps you need to take to achieve your main goal. See page 50 for a worksheet to help you determine the steps you need to take to achieve your goal.

_____6. Track your progress.

Most of the exercises in this book include a chart to help you keep track of your efforts in overcoming your depression. Recording your progress every day is essential to keeping you motivated, even when change seems difficult to achieve.

_____7. Set your intention.

Many coaches and therapists encourage people to “set their intention” at the beginning of each day, preferably before meditating. Deepak Chopra, best-selling spiritual writer, notes: “The sages of India observed thousands of years ago that our destiny is ultimately shaped by our deepest intentions and desires. An intention is a directed impulse of consciousness that contains the seed form of that which you aim to create.”

_____8. Adopt a compassionate attitude toward your efforts.

Being self-critical and perfectionistic will likely get in the way of your efforts to change. You will have setbacks and even reversals, for that is only human. You can learn to be a good “parent” to yourself as you change. A good parent guides and encourages a child toward a goal, always believing that the goal can be achieved, but also being compassionate and loving. See page 62 to learn about self-compassion.

_____9. Act like your heroes.

Inspiration is an important aspect of motivation. Think about someone who has inspired you because he/she has overcome an almost insurmountable problem. Take a moment during the day to imagine what that person would say to you to encourage your efforts to conquer your problem.

_____10. Look for progress each day.

Focus on the small positive changes that you make in your life each day, rather than on the things that are causing you problems. Even when times are difficult, you can do things each day that will help you lead a happier and fulfilling life.

INCREASING POSITIVE FEELINGS

Three Good Things That Happened Today

When it comes to overcoming depression, studies suggest that even small changes in your daily life can have profound effects.

For example, Dr. Martin Seligman, working at the University of Pennsylvania, asked a group of extremely depressed people to simply write down three good things that happened to them each day. He explained that these good things could be very small events, like feeling the warm sunshine on your face, calling a friend, or just watching a favorite TV show. Seligman discovered that within fifteen days, 94 percent of the people in the study reported that they experienced some relief from their symptoms.

If you are suffering from depression, this exercise can likely help you, too. Just make copies of this worksheet and use it at the end of each day for a minimum of three weeks.

Today's date _____

One good thing that happened today ...

A second good thing that happened today ...

A third good thing that happened today ...

Finding Awe

Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends our understanding of the world. Scientists tell us that awe, even more than other positive emotions, increases our sense of happiness and fulfillment by making us feel that we are connected to others around us. Some research even suggests that a daily dose of awe will make us more resilient and boost our immune system.

Use this worksheet to bring more awe into your life.

Name three things in nature that always bring you a sense of awe.

Name three things in the arts (visual arts, music, dance, writing, and so forth) that always bring you a feeling of awe.

Name three things you experience with friends and family that bring you a sense of awe.

Name three places you go to experience awe.

Creating a Personal Mission Statement

If you want to live each day to the fullest, you will need to think about what you really want out of your life and the principles and values that will guide your day-to-day decisions. This worksheet is designed to help you create a personal mission statement (sometimes called a “purpose statement”), which can be a simple road map to help you live a happy and fulfilling life.

A personal mission statement provides clarity and gives you a sense of purpose. It defines who you are and how you will live.

A personal mission statement is different from the goals you have for yourself. In fact, it is what your goals are based on. A personal mission statement includes your values, beliefs, and priorities in just a sentence or two. A personal mission statement will not only show you the path to make your decisions each day, it will also give you permission to say “no” to the things in your life that are not really important to you.

It is important to note that a personal mission statement is not written in stone, but rather it will change over time as your life experiences change. Your personal mission statement should be focused on self-discovery as well as purpose.

Here are some personal mission statements from some people you may know:

“To be a teacher. And to be known for inspiring my students to be more than they thought they could be.”

– *Oprah Winfrey*

“To have fun in [my] journey through life and learn from [my] mistakes.”

– *Sir Richard Branson*

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”

– *Maya Angelou*

You can use this worksheet to help you think about your personal mission statement. Think about people you admire and the traits they have that you think are important.

Write down the names of three people you admire.

Write down the traits these people have that you admire.

Write down five values that define you.

Think about the roles you play in the lives of others—friends, family, coworkers. Write down all the important roles you have in your life.

Write down the most important things you want to accomplish in your life.

Imagine who you want to become in this world, what you want to be known for, and how you want to be remembered. Write these down below.

Write down some things that you are really good at.

Now write your personal mission statement in one or two sentences.

Identifying Your Signature Strengths

Research in the area of positive psychology suggests that an important way to achieve greater happiness is to understand and practice your signature strengths (also called “character strengths”). Review the list of strengths below and rate each strength on the following scale:

- 0 = This doesn’t describe me.
- 1 = I exhibit this strength occasionally.
- 2 = I exhibit this strength often.
- 3 = I exhibit this strength every day.

After identifying your signature strengths, use the worksheet *Using My Signature Strengths* once a week to make sure you are doing activities that engage your signature strengths.

Wisdom and Knowledge

Signature strength	What it means	Rate your strengths
Curiosity, Interest in the world	You’re open to new experiences and like to take a flexible approach to most things. You don’t just tolerate ambiguity, you are intrigued by it. Your curiosity involves a wide-eyed approach to the world and a desire to actively engage in novelty.	
Love of learning	You love learning new things. You love being an expert and/or being in a position where your knowledge is valued by others.	
Judgment, Critical thinking, Open-mindedness	It’s important to you to think things through and to examine issues from all angles. You don’t quickly jump to conclusions but instead carefully consider evidence to make decisions. If the facts suggest you’ve been wrong in the past, you’ll easily change your mind.	
Ingenuity, Originality, Practical intelligence	You excel in finding new and different ways to approach problems and to achieve your goals. You rarely settle for simply doing things the conventional way and more often try to find better and more effective approaches.	
Social and emotional intelligence	You have a good understanding of yourself and of others. You are aware of your own moods and how to manage them. You’re also very good at judging the moods of others and responding appropriately to their needs.	
Perspective	This strength is a form of wisdom. Others seek you out to draw on your ability to effectively solve problems and gain perspective. You have a way of looking at the world that makes sense and is helpful to yourself and to others.	

Courage

Signature strength	What it means	Rate your strengths
Valor, Bravery	You're prepared to take on challenges and deal with difficult situations even if unpopular or dangerous. You have the courage to overcome fear as well as the ability to take a moral stance under stressful circumstances.	
Perseverance, Diligence, Industry	You finish what you start. You're industrious and prepared to take on difficult projects (and you finish them). You do what you say and sometimes you even do more.	
Integrity, Honesty	You're honest, speaking the truth, as well as living your life in a genuine and authentic way. You are down to earth and without pretense.	

Humanity and Love

Signature strength	What it means	Rate your strengths
Kindness, Generosity	You are kind and generous to others and never too busy to do a favor. You gain pleasure and joy from doing good deeds for others. In fact, your actions are often guided by other people's best interests. At the core of this particular strength is an acknowledgment of the worth of others.	
Loving, Being loved	You place a high value on close and intimate relationships with others. They feel the same way about you and you allow yourself to be loved.	

Justice

Signature strength	What it means	Rate your strengths
Loyalty, Teamwork	You're a great team player, excelling as a member of a group. You are loyal and dedicated to your colleagues, always contributing your share and working hard for the good and success of the group.	
Fairness, Equity	You do not allow your personal feelings to bias your decisions about other people. Instead, you value fairness and are guided by your larger principles of morality.	
Leadership	You are good at organizing people and events, and people turn to you to make things happen. You are highly responsible when working with others and also maintain good relationships among group members.	

Temperance

Signature strength	What it means	Rate your strengths
Self-control	You can easily keep your desires, needs, and impulses in check when necessary or appropriate. Your self-control and self-discipline help you accomplish difficult tasks.	
Discretion, Caution, Prudence	You're a careful person. You look before you leap. You rarely, if ever, say or do things you later regret. You typically wait until all options have been fully considered before embarking on any course of action. You look ahead and deliberate carefully, making sure that your long-term success takes precedence.	
Modesty, Humility	You don't seek or want the spotlight. You believe that your accomplishments speak for themselves and you don't ever seek to be the center of attention.	

Transcendence

Signature strength	What it means	Rate your strengths
Appreciation of beauty	You're one of those people who stops to smell the roses. You appreciate beauty in all of its forms.	
Gratitude	You are highly aware of all the good things that happen to you and you never take them for granted. You take the time to express your thanks and you appreciate the goodness in others.	
Hope, Optimism	You expect the best for the future and you plan and work to achieve it. Your focus is on having a positive future for yourself and the people you care about. You know that if you set goals and work hard, good things will happen.	
Spirituality, Faith, Sense of purpose	You have strong beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of your life. You are aware of your position in this world and in the larger scheme of things. This awareness shapes your beliefs, which shape your daily actions. Your spiritual practices are a strong source of comfort to you.	
Forgiveness	If you're wronged, you can forgive. You allow people a second chance. You are guided by an understanding that everyone is fallible.	
Playfulness, Humor	You like to laugh and to make others laugh and smile. You enjoy being playful and almost always see the lighter side of things.	
Passion, Enthusiasm	You're energetic, spirited, and passionate. You wake up and look forward to most days. You throw yourself into all your activities, even ones that might seem trivial to others.	

Adapted from the book Authentic Happiness by Dr. Martin Seligman.

Using Your Signature Strengths

Now that you have identified your signature strengths, it is very important to use them every day. The more you use your signature strengths, the more you will feel that your life has meaning and purpose. Use the chart below to record how often you use your signature strengths in a seven-day period. Put a check mark for each half-hour period you are using your strengths each day. If you find that you are not using your strengths for at least an hour each day, then consider making changes in your life so that this can happen.

Day	Your signature strengths	Put a check mark for each half-hour you use them
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Things You Can Do To Lift Your Spirits

Most people who are depressed cut back on their activities, even the ones they used to enjoy. Not surprisingly, when you stop doing things that give you pleasure, then your mood gets even worse and life's burdens take on more importance.

However, you can reverse this downward cycle when you commit to doing pleasurable activities each day. Make a list of five activities you can do to lift your spirits and have a more positive mood throughout the day. Try to do at least one of the activities each day for a week, rating your mood from 1 to 10 immediately after each activity, where 1 = sad or feeling empty and 10 = happy and energized. If you can commit to doing more pleasurable activities each day, you will likely make faster progress in overcoming your depression.

Activities:

Day 1

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Day 2

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Day 3

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Day 4

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Day 5

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Day 6

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Day 7

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Activity _____ Rating _____

Write down any thoughts about the things you can do to have a more positive mood every day.

Creating a Gratitude Journal

Researchers who study why some people are happier than others consistently find that adopting a daily “attitude of gratitude” lifts our spirits and acts as a barrier to the small and large things that would normally upset us. People who are consistently grateful have been found to be happier, more energetic, more hopeful, and report more frequent positive emotions.

Being grateful is more than just saying “thank you.” Robert Emmons, a prominent researcher on how gratitude affects our lives, describes gratitude as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life.”

Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor at the University of California and author of *The How of Happiness*, notes that gratitude has many benefits in our daily lives, focusing us on positive experiences, helping us be more connected to others, and increasing our satisfaction with life. Use the “Daily Gratitude Calendar” to record something you are grateful for each day. Don’t repeat yourself, but rather look for something new to be grateful for as soon as you wake up.

“Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you, and to give thanks continuously. And because all things have contributed to your advancement, you should include all things in your gratitude.”

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Daily Gratitude Calendar

Write down something you are grateful for each day for 30 days. Try not to repeat yourself.

Day	What I am grateful for
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	

9	
10	
11	
12	
13	
14	
15	
16	
17	
18	
19	
20	
21	
22	
23	
24	
25	
26	
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28	
29	
30	

Feeling Better Through Spiritual Awareness

Broadly speaking, spirituality is the meaning that people seek in their lives through connection with a higher power. While formal religion can certainly provide a sense of spirituality, many people seek to bring spirituality into their lives outside their religion.

Research tells us that becoming more spiritual may be particularly helpful for people with emotional problems, helping them deal with a variety of life's challenges. This makes sense because spirituality emphasizes the importance of a positive outlook, reflection on one's goals and purpose, and seeking inner strength and peace in the context of living a value-based life.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify spiritual practices to help you through difficult times and also to enrich your day-to-day life. Although you may feel better from the very first time you try one of these practices, it is worth noting that bringing spirituality into your life is a long-term commitment and you will see the most important changes to your emotional well-being over time.

Look at the list of spiritual practices below and check off the ones you think would be most helpful. Then answer the questions for each of the practices you have checked to help you commit to one or more of these practices. Add other practices you would like to try.

_____ Spending time appreciating nature (e.g., taking a walk in the woods or by the beach)

_____ Meditation

_____ Prayer

_____ Community service

_____ Keeping a journal

_____ Reading books about spirituality

_____ Yoga

Other spiritual practices:

Spiritual practice #1 _____

Specifically, how would you do this?

Write down the names of people you know who have a similar interest in this practice.

Write down any times in the past you have found this practice helpful.

Write down things that might get in the way of doing this practice on a regular basis.

Spiritual practice #2 _____

Specifically, how would you do this?

Write down the names of people you know who have a similar interest in this practice.

Write down any times in the past you have found this practice helpful.

Write down things that might get in the way of doing this practice on a regular basis.

Spiritual practice #3 _____

Specifically, how would you do this?

Write down the names of people you know who have a similar interest in this practice.

Write down any times in the past you have found this practice helpful.

Write down things that might get in the way of doing this practice on a regular basis.

Finding Joy and Balance in Your Life

The G.L.A.D. technique was developed by Donald Altman as a particularly useful approach to developing a positive attitude toward life (see *The Mindfulness Toolbox*, New Harbinger Publications). It is designed to help people pay attention to positive things that are around them all of the time but that frequently go unnoticed.

While some people may want to fill in the G.L.A.D. worksheet throughout the day, it is more practical to fill it out at the end of the day. Make copies of this worksheet so that you can practice the technique every day for at least three weeks. After three weeks, your “positive mindfulness” will become a habit. After three weeks, you might want to use the worksheet just once a week, but you should still do it on a regular schedule (for example every Sunday night). Developing “positive mindfulness” is particularly important for people who are stressed and depressed, but it should also be considered a resiliency tool which can help you find daily happiness in your life.

Keep your worksheets together and look at them from time to time. You may also want to share the positive experiences you write down on your worksheet with others. Sharing your positive thoughts and feelings makes them even more important.

Learning to be G.L.A.D.

Today’s date _____

G: Something you were *grateful* for today.

Think of something very basic you are grateful for. It could be something as simple as the sunlight or the nourishing food you eat. Write it below.

Now think of something truly important in your life, like a meaningful relationship, kids, friends, or your health. Write it below.

L: Something you *learned* today.

Write down something positive you learned about yourself today. It might be something you already knew but it came into focus today.

Write down something you learned about another person today. Again, it might be something you were already aware of but you were more aware of this quality today.

Write down a fact you learned today that made you curious or more aware of the world around you.

Write down something you learned today that changed your perspective of yourself or the world around you in a positive way.

A: One small *accomplishment* you did today.

Many people feel that accomplishments have to be big important tasks, but it's the little things that make a difference in your life. Perhaps you are working on a goal, like exercising more or eating healthier or finding a new job. Small steps toward your goal are important accomplishments.

Write down something you accomplished today.

D: Something that brought you *delight* today.

What made you laugh or smile?

What small thing of beauty did you see today?

What did you hear today that lifted your spirits? A song? A child's voice? A joke?

Now close your eyes and think of your day and what you wrote. Breathe deeply for a few minutes and visualize a positive image from the day. Write down something important from this exercise that you want to remember.

Focusing on Positive Feelings

Many people don't realize how much power they have over their emotions. When you are having a hard day, thinking about the things that trigger your positive emotions can really help. Complete this worksheet to focus on positive thoughts, memories, and emotions.

What is the one thing that you always brings you joy?

Write down a time when you had a wonderful surprise.

What is something you did you are really proud of?

Write down a time when you achieved a goal because you wouldn't stop trying.

Name a person who always makes you feel confident.

What is something you do that also makes you feel energized?

Write down something that always makes you feel hopeful.

When you do feel most loving?

Name an activity that almost always makes you feel calm and centered.

Think of a person, place, or thing that gives you a sense of belonging.

Think of a book, movie, or song that always gives you a strong sense of optimism.

Name an activity that always give you pleasure.

Write down the names of people who have inspired you.

Think of a time in your life, even if it was just a few hours, when you felt completely content.

Write down three things you are grateful for.

Think of a time when you were completely filled with awe.

Think of something someone did for you that showed they really care about you.

Think of a time when you laughed so hard that tears came to your eyes.

Think of a time when you felt particularly capable.

Think of a time when your efforts were sincerely acknowledged.

Think of a time when you were treated with unexpected kindness.

Loving Kindness Meditation

The “loving kindness meditation” is a simple exercise in which you recite positive thoughts about yourself and others. Saying this meditation aloud can immediately improve your mood because it focuses you on the positive things in your life and your sense of purpose. The effects of this practice can also be surprisingly long lasting. Studies show that the regular practice of this meditation can increase your resiliency and bring you a sense of fulfillment you may have never thought possible.

This meditation has five simple steps. It begins by inviting you to express positive thoughts about yourself, followed by positive thoughts of someone you care about. Then it requires something you may not have done before: you send out positive thoughts toward someone you feel neutral about, followed by positive thoughts toward someone you dislike. Then you direct your positive thoughts out to the universe.

This meditation takes just a few minutes, but it goes a long way to opening up your positive emotions and letting go of your negative judgments.

Here’s how to do it:

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed.
2. Imagine yourself in a place where you feel complete satisfaction and have an all-encompassing sense of well-being. Perhaps you are sitting on a beach at sunset with the warm glow of the sun still on your skin. Perhaps you are in your own living room, surrounded by people who love you. Think of a place that makes you unspeakably happy.
3. Now say the following phrases out loud.

I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for myself.

Now visualize someone you care about and say:

I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for you.

Now visualize someone you feel neutral about—someone you neither like nor dislike—and say:

I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for you.

Now think of someone you *don’t* like and say:

I wish you happiness, calm, and peace.

Finally, direct your loving kindness to the universe and say:

May all beings everywhere find happiness and peace.

NEW WAYS TO THINK

Using Coping Statements to Talk Back to Your Depression

Accepting your thoughts and feelings can help you move past your difficulties. Taking a positive “solution-focused” view of your life can stimulate a positive and optimistic way of viewing your life. Look at the statements below and put a check by the statements that ring true for you.

- I can't change what has already happened.
- I'm not going to drive myself crazy with things I can't change.
- Dwelling on the past keeps me from appreciating what is in the present.
- I can accept things the way they are.
- This feels bad, but it is a normal reaction and will pass.
- I have dealt with problems before and I can deal with this.
- Thoughts are just happening in my brain; they are not THE TRUTH.
- I can learn from the past to solve present and future problems.
- I can get through this.
- This is difficult, but it is temporary.
- If I stop and calm myself down, then I can get through this.
- These are just feelings and will go away.
- I can feel badly but still act in ways that are good for me and good for others.
- I don't need to change everything at once.
- I can accept myself the way I am.
- I can accept my situation for what it is and still be happy.
- It's okay to feel this way.

Write down other statements that can help you cope.

You can use this sheet to write down and reflect on how successful you are at using coping statements. Make multiple copies of this sheet to use when you are trying to cope with difficult feelings.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

Write down distressing thoughts and feelings you are having.

Write down the coping statement you used.

Rate how upset you feel *before* reading the coping statement _____

1 = not very upset 10 = as upset and distressed as I get

Rate how upset you feel *after* reading the coping statement _____

1 = not very upset 10 = as upset and distressed as I get

Write down other thoughts and feelings.

Identifying Your Automatic and Irrational Thoughts

Psychologists believe that people who are depressed have certain kinds of automatic and irrational thoughts that distort their view of themselves and their world. These thoughts are “irrational” because they are not based on any facts; however, depressed people still act as if they are true. Recognizing your automatic thoughts and replacing them with rational ones can be an important part of overcoming your depression.

First, think about these different kinds of automatic and irrational thoughts below and see if you can give an example of when you have this type of irrational thought.

Discounting

You insist that your accomplishments or positive qualities “don’t count.”

Example _____

Mind reading

You assume that people are reacting negatively to you, when there’s no real evidence for this.

Example _____

Fortune telling

You arbitrarily predict that things will turn out badly.

Example _____

Magnification/Minimization

You blow negative possibilities way out of proportion. You minimize the importance of positive interactions or events.

Example _____

Emotional reasoning

You reason from how you feel rather than from what logic would tell you. For example, you might feel that someone is disappointed with you, even when there is no evidence this is true.

Example _____

“Should” statements

You criticize yourself or other people with “shoulds” or “shouldn’ts,” “musts,” “oughts,” and “have tos”

Example _____

Labeling

You identify with your shortcomings. Instead of saying, “I made a mistake,” you tell yourself, “I’m a jerk,” “a fool,” “a loser.”

Example _____

Catastrophic thinking

You imagine that the worst possible thing could happen in a given situation, even though there is no evidence that this might be so.

Example _____

Looking back at the types of automatic/irrational thoughts, which ones do you think you are most likely to have?

Are you ready to change the automatic/irrational thoughts that are contributing to your depression? Use the worksheet on the next page to practice substituting your irrational thoughts for ones that are realistic.

Talking Back to Your Automatic and Irrational Thoughts

See if you can “catch” each time you have an automatic/irrational thought. Write it down in the first column. Then, write down how much you believe that this thought is true from 1 to 100 percent. In the third column, write down the type of automatic thought this represents (refer to the previous worksheet). Then, write a rational response to this automatic thought, based on facts. Finally, write down how much you believe your rational response is true, from 1 to 100 percent. Make copies of this worksheet and use it to evaluate your thoughts every time you are feeling discouraged or down on yourself.

Irrational/Automatic Thought	Belief This Thought Is True	Type of Automatic Thought	Rational Response	Belief Rational Response Is True

Giving Up Negative Judgments About Others

Many people have a difficult time relating to others without being highly judgmental. Some people divide the world into “good” and “bad” with no room to see that the people around them have many different qualities. Other people are overly critical. They focus most of their energy on the things people do that they think are wrong, and so they are often angry, unhappy, and lonely.

Examples of Negative Judgments

Do any of these thoughts sound like ones you have? Fill in the blanks below.

- My _____ is so mean, I can’t stand to be with her.
- _____ is not a good friend, because I keep inviting her out but she never invites me to go with her.
- _____ is incompetent and my work is miserable.
- My _____ thinks about everyone but me.
- My _____ is really a loser. No wonder he/she is having problems.

Write down three negative judgments that you have had recently.

If you are prone to negatively judging others, it is probably detracting from your own happiness and life satisfaction. This worksheet can help. You don’t have to “change” the way you think or feel, but rather just observe and acknowledge your negative and critical thoughts as if they were clouds floating by in the sky. In other words, don’t react to these thoughts with any particular emotion; just let them come and go.

Use the chart on the next page to keep track of all your negative judgments about the people in your life for three days.

Recording Your Negative Judgments

As soon as you write down each thought, take a deep breath and let the thought float away. Record your negative judgments for three consecutive days. Use additional pages if you need them.

Day	Time	Negative Judgment

Focusing on Solutions Rather Than Problems

Most people think about their problems constantly, focusing on how unhappy they feel and how their problems are holding them back. But what if, instead, you focused on the *solutions* to your problems? This worksheet will help you start thinking about how you solved problems in the past and how your life can be better today when you make even small changes. Focusing on solutions, rather than dwelling on your problems, can open up many new possibilities.

How have you tried to address this problem? _____

What has worked, even a little bit? _____

Have there been changes for better or worse since you decided to take action? _____

Who else noticed this? _____

What will it be like when the problem is solved? _____

What will you be doing instead? _____

What difference will it make in your life when the problem is solved? _____

How will other people know that things are better? _____

Who will notice first? _____

And then who? _____

What else will be different? _____

Solving Your Problems One Step at a Time

One of the most serious symptoms of depression is the belief that your problems are beyond your control and will never get better. But most problems can be addressed by setting a realistic goal and determining the steps necessary to achieve that goal.

For example, Diane was depressed because she felt overwhelmed by the stress in her life and she had very few things that made her happy. Diane lived with her elderly mother, who had several serious illnesses. Diane felt that she had no time for herself and no social life. Diane didn't like her job as a warehouse manager, but it paid well and she needed the money, and she didn't feel that she had the time or energy to find a more fulfilling job.

Diane began the process of improving her life by listing her two main goals:

- To engage in more social activities and meet new people
- To find a more interesting job that paid as least as much as her old job

Diane felt that the first goal was easier to achieve and would help her feel better about her life more quickly.

She began by writing a goal that was achievable and measurable. It is important to have a goal that is measurable so you can know what to work toward and to be clear when your goal has been accomplished. Diane's goal was: "to go out and meet new people at least once a week." Diane broke her goal into small steps or sub-goals. They were:

1. To make a list of activity groups in her area by doing research on the Internet
2. To decide on three activity groups that she would enjoy
3. To find several people who would stay with her mother when she was out
4. To go out to an activity once a week (even if she wasn't in the mood)

Within a month, Diane had found a knitting group that met every Friday night at a local Starbucks. Through the group, she made a few friends and began to feel less isolated in her life.

Of course, not every journey to solving a problem is so straightforward. Sometimes you have to change the steps you must take to achieve a goal. Sometimes there are unforeseen obstacles, and many times motivation is a problem. Let's face it, change is hard. But setting a goal and writing down the steps to achieve your goal is an important part of the process of creating a happier and more fulfilling life.

Use this worksheet to set a goal and the steps you need to take to achieve that goal. This worksheet will also help you understand the factors that can help you achieve your goal.

Write down a goal that will address a problem that is bothering you.

How will your life be different when you meet that goal?

Who can support you in achieving the goal?

Do you anticipate any obstacles to achieving your goal? Is there any way to address these obstacles?

Write down the steps you need to take to achieve your goal and the dates you think you can achieve each step. When you break down your goals into small incremental steps they are easier to achieve.

Step 1

Date to achieve step 1 _____

Step 2

Date to achieve step 2 _____

Step 3

Date to achieve step 3 _____

Step 4

Date to achieve step 4 _____

Step 5

Date to achieve step 5 _____

Step 6

Date to achieve step 6_____

Step 7

Date to achieve step 7_____

Step 8

Date to achieve step 8_____

Step 9

Date to achieve step 9_____

Step 10

Date to achieve step 10_____

Developing Your Nurturing Inner Voice

Many people have an internal voice that is constantly criticizing them and attacking their self-worth. If this is true for you, this voice may have originated with a parent, a teacher, or another overly critical adult in your childhood. It may be a mixture of harsh comments you heard when you were growing up. You may not even remember just where or when the criticizing voice in your head appeared, but it is important to know that you don't have to listen to it anymore.

Instead of listening to the critical voices in your head, you can develop a nurturing inner voice that you can listen to when you are feeling low and you are questioning your self-worth.

Begin by writing down five nurturing statements that you want to hear. These are the kind of statements that someone who cares deeply about you might say to you.

Some examples might be:

I'm really proud of what you have accomplished.

You always amaze me.

You should give yourself more credit for all that you do.

Now write in things you'd like to hear.

Now think of someone you consider to be very nurturing. It can be someone you know or it can be someone you don't know well at all but you think of as a nurturing person. It could even be someone from fiction or someone you made up in your mind.

Now imagine that this person is saying any or all of the above statements to you. Describe the situation (room, clothing, body position) you are in.

Think about this scene until it is very vivid in your mind. What else is this person saying to you or doing that makes you feel cared for?

What are you saying back?

Now change the channel to your critical voice, just for a moment. Imagine that your critical voice is back talking to you in your head. What is it saying?

NEW WAYS TO THINK

Using a Contract to Commit to Change

Behavioral contracts are not just for kids. In fact, creating a behavioral contract and sharing it with others is one of the most effective ways for adults to motivate themselves to make changes in their lives. Use the contract below to commit yourself to changes that will help you overcome your depression or any other problem that is holding you back in your life.

I, _____ (name), agree to

(specific behavior you want to change) _____.

I will begin on (date) _____ and plan to reach my goal (specific goal)

by (target date) _____.

In order to reach my final goal, I have devised the following schedule of sub-goals.

_____	_____
(sub-goal)	(date to complete)
_____	_____
(sub-goal)	(date to complete)
_____	_____
(sub-goal)	(date to complete)
_____	_____
(sub-goal)	(date to complete)

Some of the strategies I will use to change my behavior: _____

I sign this contract as an indication of my personal commitment to reach my goal.

(your signature)

(date)

I have recruited _____, a helper who will witness my contract and help me by:

(witness's signature)

(date)

Acts of Kindness Lead to Happiness

Researchers tell us that being kind will not just benefit people you help but can also make you happy, too, and can lift your mood on a permanent basis. According to research by Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness*, kindness can start a chain of positive social consequences, bringing you closer to others and helping you appreciate the most positive aspects of human nature.

The Random Acts of Kindness movement advocates thoughtful and considerate acts as a way of life, but research actually shows that the “happiness benefits” of acts of kindness are greatest when you consciously decide to do a kind act just one day a week. On that day, you should seek to do a *significant* act of kindness, for example, not just holding the door for someone but perhaps taking the time to write a note of appreciation to someone important in your life.

Use this worksheet to plan and then record your weekly act of kindness.

Best day of week to do your act of kindness _____

Things You Can Do

People Who Might Benefit from Your Kind Acts

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

At the end of the day, write down any thoughts about what you did and what happened.

Increasing Flow Experiences

In psychological terms, “flow” is a mental state in which a person is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus while performing a challenging activity. People more commonly call this “being in the zone.” Many psychologists feel that when people have frequent experiences of “flow,” preferably several times a day, they experience more positive emotions, as well as a sense of well-being and purpose.

Flow is a feeling in which even difficult tasks become easy. You lose track of time because you are so involved in the activity. Runners often talk about a “runner’s high,” when running even long distances becomes almost effortless. Some people experience flow while doing a hobby, like gardening or restoring their car. Some people are lucky enough to experience flow doing their work.

Sonja Lyubomirsky, in her book *The How of Happiness*, writes, “The experience of flow leads us to be involved in life (rather than be alienated from it), to enjoy activities (rather than to find them dreary), to have a sense of control (rather than helplessness), and to feel a strong sense of self (rather than unworthiness). All these factors imbue life with meaning and lend it a richness and intensity. And happiness.”

You will know you are experiencing a flow activity when:

1. You’re completely involved in what you’re doing; you’re completely focused on what you’re doing.
2. There’s a sense of great pleasure as you perform a flow task; you feel outside of everyday reality.
3. There’s a sense of inner clarity; you know what needs to be done and you get immediate feedback on how well you’re doing.
4. You know that the activity is doable, even though it may be difficult; you’re confident that you have the necessary skills to complete the task successfully.
5. You lose your sense of self, and your worries and concerns drift away.
6. You lose track of time, and you’re completely focused on the present moment.
7. There’s an intrinsic motivation; whatever you’re doing to produce flow becomes its own reward.

The feelings of flow are a “natural high” and, in fact, your brain does produce chemicals that make you feel “high,” including endorphins and endocannabinoids, which are a naturally synthesized version of THC. This is the chemical responsible for the buzz that marijuana produces.

This worksheet will examine how you can have more periods of flow in your life.

Use this sheet to think about the activities that create flow. Then, use the chart on the next page to record your success at creating flow activities each day.

List hobbies that you feel produce a sense of flow.

List challenging activities that produce flow, such as crossword puzzles, Scrabble, and so on.

List exercise or other physical activities that produce flow.

List cleaning and organizing activities that produce flow.

List other activities that produce flow.

Rate Your Flow Activities

Write down the flow activities that you do each day and rate your overall mood, where 1 = neutral mood and 10 = very positive mood.

Day	Flow Activities	Time Spent	Overall Mood (1 = neutral mood / 10 = very positive mood)
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Practicing Compassionate Self-Care

People who are depressed are typically very hard on themselves. They may feel and act like their depression is their fault or that they are somehow “flawed.” Many people suffering from depression feel that their past actions and choices are the reasons for their depression and they have an internal dialogue that keeps them feeling low.

If this sounds like you, then you know that this type of attitude and behavior is no help at all. Rather than being hard on yourself, you can practice compassionate self-care. You can treat yourself with understanding and kindness, just the way you would treat a friend in need. Practicing compassionate self-care is not being self-indulgent. Self-indulgence is when you give yourself more than you need, like eating two desserts or buying clothes when your closets are already bursting. Compassionate self-care is also not self-pity. Self-pity is when you feel that your problems are worse than the problems of everyone else. Compassionate self-care recognizes the fact that all humans have problems and all humans make mistakes. And that includes you!

In this worksheet, you should list all the ways you would treat a friend in need. Think of someone you care about very much and imagine that he or she is having a very difficult time.

What would you say?

What would you do?

Now think of yourself at a low point, when your problems seem overwhelming. Write down where you are and what you are doing.

What can you say to yourself that shows compassion and understanding?

What can you do for yourself that shows compassion and understanding?

Creating a Better Day

When you are feeling depressed, you may not feel like doing anything at all. People who are severely depressed sometimes say that they don't even feel like getting out of bed in the morning.

Planning your day so that it includes meaningful activities can help motivate you to spend more time doing things that will lift your mood and bring purpose to your life.

Begin by writing down activities that will make any day more meaningful.

An activity that expresses my values:

An activity that always makes me smile:

An activity that relaxes me:

An activity that connects me with people I care about:

An activity that makes me think:

An activity I enjoy but I never have time for:

An activity that brings back wonderful memories:

A spiritual activity that makes me feel connected to a higher power:

An activity that is always fun:

Other activities that are meaningful:

On the chart below, fill in the time slots during which you have known obligations. Then schedule at least two meaningful activities from the previous page. Choose activities that you know are logistically possible to do and write them in the appropriate time slots. Try to schedule one meaningful activity at the start of the day and another at the end of the day. Make copies of this chart and fill in one chart every day for at least a week.

Day/date: _____

7am	
8am	
9am	
10am	
11am	
Noon	
1pm	
2pm	
3pm	

4pm	
5pm	
6pm	
7pm	
8pm	
9pm	
10pm	

Overcoming Depression with the Help of Exercise

Regular exercise can help you overcome your anxiety in a number of ways. During exercise, your brain increases the production of chemicals that can lift your mood and regulate your emotions. With regular exercise, you will feel stronger and more confident and be more likely to feel that you can make positive changes in your life. Exercise will also increase the oxygen flow to your brain, which may help you think more clearly, more rationally, and more positively.

Directions

1. Circle the types of exercise you can do on a regular basis:

bike riding	baseball	football	handball
jogging	hiking	soccer	karate
walking	skateboarding	surfing	Pilates
weight lifting	basketball	skiing	yoga
tennis	swimming	dancing	other

2. Write down any other exercises you think you can do that aren't listed above.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____
- d) _____

3. Now choose three of these exercises you would like to do over the next week.

- a) _____
- b) _____
- c) _____

4. Decide how much time you need for each exercise. Fifteen minutes? A half-hour? An hour?

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

5. For each of the exercises, write down how often you can realistically do them in a week.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

6. For each of the exercises, write down which days are best to exercise and what time of day is most realistic.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Use this chart to record how many times you *actually* exercise and the effect that exercise has on your mood.

Day	Type of Exercise	Amount of Time	Mood Before	Mood After
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

Getting More Sleep Can Help Improve Your Mood

Do you have a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep? A lack of sleep will reduce the serotonin levels in your brain, which may make it harder to control your moods during the day. There are a variety of techniques that can help you get the sleep you need, but, of course, they only work if you are diligent at trying them and then using the ones that work best. Getting enough sleep is an important part of your overall plan to overcome your depression and is also important for your general health.

There are a variety of medications available to help you sleep, including prescription medication, herbs, and supplements, but always consult a physician before taking any kind of sleep aid.

Here are some other things you can try. On the chart on the next page, keep track of your sleep and the methods you use to sleep better. Track your progress for at least two weeks.

Techniques to Help You Get More Sleep

- Listen to soft music, read, take a warm shower, or meditate before going to bed.
- Exercise for at least a half-hour each day, but not before you go to bed.
- Write a to-do list for the following day and then clear your head of those concerns.
- Practice deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, either entirely or at least in the evenings.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature (65–68 degrees).
- If you are sensitive to light and sound, wear earplugs and a sleep mask or try a white-noise machine to mask the sound. There are various white-noise apps available if you have a smartphone.
- If you are having trouble falling asleep, get out of bed and do some light activity (like reading) in another room. Go back to bed when you feel drowsy.
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Avoid eating heavy meals for at least two to three hours before bed.
- Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable.
- Write down other ideas to help you get more sleep.

Sleep Diary

Date	Hours Slept	Trouble Sleeping?	Methods Tried	Successful?
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N		<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N
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How Diet Affects Your Mood

Diet, stress, and mood are all intertwined, so it's important to consider what you're putting in your body, not only for your physical health but also for your emotional well-being.

It is not necessary to go to extremes in changing your diet. By simply being more mindful of what you're putting in your body, you can find small ways to improve, and that can add up to big changes.

The following are some of the substances that can affect your depression:

- **Caffeine:** You'll find this stimulant in coffee, tea, chocolate, soda, energy drinks, and some over-the-counter medications. The temporary boost it provides can end in fatigue, headache, and tension. Caffeine has also been identified as a potential trigger for anxiety attacks and a contributor to other health issues such as insomnia, heartburn, aggression, irritability, heart palpitations, and high blood pressure.
- **Salt:** Sodium is present in many processed foods, so check labels and look for low-sodium or salt-free alternatives. Also, be aware of how much salt you use while cooking. Sodium consumption affects fluid retention, weight, and blood pressure, all of which, in turn, can affect your mood.
- **Sugar:** Excessive intake of simple sugars (such as white or brown sugar and honey) can cause health problems such as diabetes and hypoglycemia. Also, the temporary uplifting effects come with some other serious downsides, including an increased risk of depression in those who have a sugar-heavy diet.
- **Preservatives and hormones:** These substances are present in processed foods and many types of meats. Our bodies were not built to handle these additives, and their possible side effects have been heavily debated. Swapping in some whole, unprocessed, organic foods can help reduce consumption of these potentially harmful substances.
- **Nicotine and alcohol:** Introducing these substances into your system can cause a range of problems, not the least of which is aggravating anxiety. Nicotine is a stimulant, like caffeine, and alcohol a depressant. The addictive properties of both nicotine and alcohol have also been well documented.

It should also be mentioned that what you don't put in your body can also be problematic. Nutrient deficiencies and dehydration can cause irritability, anxiety, and fatigue. So stop skipping meals and make sure you are drinking enough water.

How Your Diet Affects Your Mood

For the next week, keep track of how often you consume any of the above-listed items and write in the predominant moods you had each day.

Day	Food and Drink	Your Moods
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

COPING WITH STRESS AND DIFFICULT FEELINGS

Breaking the Cycle of Stress and Depression

Dealing with your stress in a constructive way can be an important part of overcoming your depression. Of course, not all stress is bad. A small amount of stress is actually good for you, keeping you alert and motivated. But sustained stress will elevate stress biochemicals such as cortisol, which can take a toll on your mood and your body. Over time, cortisol can also weaken your immune system and even affect your memory.

Sustained stress also interferes with “happiness biochemicals” such as serotonin and dopamine. These are biochemicals produced in the brain and body that translate into feelings of calm, happiness, and well-being. They are the same biochemicals that are affected when you take anti-depressant medication.

The connection between stress and depression is complex and circular. Besides the direct impact on your body and mood, excess stress can lead to poor habits like drinking and overeating, which will then exacerbate your feelings of depression.

Fortunately, you have it in your power to break the cycle of stress and depression. Researchers tell us that specific activities can reduce the harmful biochemicals associated with prolonged stress and elevate the biochemicals associated with feelings of satisfaction and well-being.

This worksheet shows you things you can do every day to fight the negative impact of stress on your depression. When you make these activities daily habits, they will not only help you overcome your depression but will also help prevent physical problems.

Put a check mark by the activities you are most likely to do. See if you can find one activity to do in each category. Then estimate the time you will do the activities each day. Finally, put a check mark when you have accomplished this activity each day in a week. Keep this chart for three weeks.

Week of _____ (Date)

Activity	Check If Interested	Estimated Time/Day	Achieved (put a check mark for each day)
Scheduled Relaxation			
Deep breathing			
Meditation			
Visualization			
Relax with quiet music			
Yoga			

Other			
Self-Care			
7-9 hours sleep			
Good nutrition			
Minimum half-hour exercise			
Massage			
Other			
Social Activities			
Meaningful conversation(s)			
Fun activities with family or friends			
Meals with family or friends			
Spiritual activities with others			
Other			
Time Management			
Set goals and steps to achieve them			
Realistic "to-do" list			
Delegating appropriate responsibilities			
Realistic scheduling and planning			
Other			
Creative and Fun Activities			
Journaling			
Hobbies			
Time with pets			
Play			
Other			

List other things you can do to reduce stress in your life:

Dealing with Shame and Guilt

Sometimes people become fixated on blaming themselves for certain situations or events. They blame themselves for something terrible that has happened as if they were the sole cause of a particular misfortune. Yet it is very rare that a single person causes a complex event. People who have suffered a trauma often feel shame and guilt, even when they had no part in causing the trauma and may have even been a victim.

This worksheet is designed to help you reduce your shame and guilt by thinking about the many factors that might have caused a particular event.

Describe a situation where you blamed yourself.

List other factors that contributed to the situation.

List three ways that blaming yourself has kept you from living your life more fully.

Getting Through Difficult Times with Mindfulness

As you may know, mindfulness is a technique that Western psychology has borrowed from the Buddhist tradition of Mindful Meditation. Mindfulness involves bringing your attention to what is happening in the present moment. When you are “mindful,” you are aware of both your internal experiences as well as what you experience in the world around you. As you observe your internal and external experiences, you try not to judge them as good or bad, or even react to them at all. When you are mindful, you are aware and present in the moment.

Does this sound simple? It might be a little harder than you think. But practicing mindfulness is well worth the effort as it has proven to be very helpful in overcoming depression. Mindfulness helps you be aware of your negative thoughts and feelings, without judging them. As you practice mindfulness, your negative thoughts and feelings eventually make them less powerful.

Many studies have also shown that there are measurable health benefits when you practice mindfulness on a regular basis. These include boosting the immune system, improving memory, and increasing your ability to focus.

There are two main types of mindfulness. The first is called Mindful Meditation and refers to setting aside some time each day to practice mindfulness. There are many books and audio resources to help you learn Mindful Meditation. Here is an example of Mindful Meditation from Dartmouth College Health Center. <https://www.betweenessions.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Mindful-Meditation.mp3>.

The second type of mindfulness occurs in everyday life and involves practicing mindful awareness in everyday activities. You practice mindfulness while you are walking, while you are eating, even while you are doing a chore like sweeping the floor. All you have to do is be aware of your inner and outer experiences without trying to judge them or change them. You can use the worksheet on the next page to record practicing mindfulness at least once a day.

Practicing Mindfulness

Use this sheet to help you remember to practice mindfulness at least once a day.

Week beginning (date) _____

Day	Type of activity	Describe your experience (sensations, emotions, thoughts)	Your mood after this exercise
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Accepting Unpleasant Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings

We use language to define our experiences, including those that have caused unpleasant feelings. By labeling experiences negatively, we create the tendency to limit, avoid, or control situations so that the discomfort associated with them will not be repeated. When you are depressed, you may be avoiding experiences just because they have a negative association, but avoiding these situations may be restricting your life and keeping you more depressed.

This worksheet will act as a guide to help you understand that your experience of the present moment does not have to be determined by the past. Accepting unpleasant internal experiences, rather than actively avoiding them, creates opportunities for positive and rewarding experiences that you might otherwise have missed.

Identify five negative internal experiences that cause you to severely limit, avoid, or control certain activities (for example, anxiety, worry, sadness, jealousy, fear, insecurity, etc.):

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Write down the situations you avoid in order to keep from experiencing the discomfort of these five internal experiences.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Finally, identify and describe potentially positive internal experiences you could have if you permitted yourself to engage in these situations, rather than avoid them. Be as specific and descriptive as possible. This will help you identify the experiences you are choosing to miss out on.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

CONNECTING TO OTHERS

Communicating Your Needs and Feelings with “I” Statements

Sometimes people don't tell others how they feel, which can lead to a variety of frustrating problems. It helps when you practice using “I” statements, like the ones on this worksheet. “I” statements are a method of saying precisely how you feel and what you want others to understand. Using “I” statements doesn't mean that you'll get everything you want, but at least people will understand what is important to you. This worksheet will help you think about making your feelings clearer to specific people. Fill it in with different people in mind, and then practice using similar statements in real-life situations.

Perhaps someone in your life could also benefit from making clear “I” statements? You should also consider giving this worksheet to people who might benefit from communicating their needs more effectively.

Fill in these “I” statements with a particular person in mind:

Name of person: _____

I feel _____ because _____.

I would like it if you would _____.

I really want _____.

I hope you understand that _____.

Name of person: _____

I feel _____ because _____.

I would like it if you would _____.

I really want _____.

I hope you understand that _____.

Name of person: _____

I feel _____ because _____.

I would like it if you would _____.

I really want _____.

I hope you understand that _____.

Name of person: _____

I feel _____ because _____.

I would like it if you would _____.

I really want _____.

I hope you understand that _____.

Name of person: _____

I feel _____ because _____.

I would like it if you would _____.

I really want _____.

I hope you understand that _____.

Name of person: _____

I feel _____ because _____.

I would like it if you would _____.

I really want _____.

I hope you understand that _____.

Don't Be Alone

Humans are social animals, and our genetic makeup predisposes us to want to seek the company of others. But, like most genetic character traits, there appears to be a significant variation in how much individuals desire to be social. Some people say they can't stand to be alone for even a few hours. Others say they prefer to be alone much of the time. But, despite the variation in the desire for social contact, from a psychological perspective, social isolation can be a big problem, particularly during times of emotional stress. Ideally, people should have at least several close friends, as well as a group of people who make them feel they are connected to a community. A close-knit family, of course, is also important.

If you find yourself being alone much of the time—even if it “feels” okay to you—you should consider increasing your social contact. Take a look at the social activities listed below. When you get up each morning, think about at least one social activity you can do each day.

Note: Internet-based social activities like social media and email are helpful but they do not replace real-life contact with people.

Social Activities Checklist

(Choose at least one to do each day)

- Have dinner with a friend.
- Attend a Meetup (go to Meetup.com for groups in your area).
- Take a walk with a friend.
- Attend a community service group (Rotary Club, Kiwanis, and so on).
- Reconnect with friends and family. List two or three people who come to mind:

- Attend a spiritual or religious group.
- Go on a nature-related activity (e.g., hiking, bird watching, travel).
- Attend a hobby- or craft-related group (e.g., knitting, photography, etc.).
- Attend a course.
- Attend a community or political meeting.
- Attend a support group.
- Volunteer to help others.
- Attend local lectures at the library.

_____ Join a sports team.

_____ Attend a religious service.

_____ Join a book club (or start one).

_____ Try Couchsurfing.org, a community of travelers (you can share your couch with people from around the world) that also sponsors local events in thousands of cities.

_____ Take a cooking class.

Other ideas?

Seeing How Others Value You

When you are feeling depressed, you may only see the things you don't like about yourself, and you can easily forget that other people see your positive qualities. This worksheet can help you see how important you are to others and how they value you.

Directions

1) List the people who love and value you.

Next to each of the following words, write the name of the person who loves and values you.

Mother	_____		
Father	_____		
Sisters	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Brothers	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Aunts	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Uncles	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Boyfriend/ Girlfriend	_____		
Grandfather	_____	_____	
Grandmother	_____	_____	
Cousins	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Friends	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

Teachers _____

Coaches _____

Neighbors _____

Write the names of anyone else who loves and values you.

Other _____

Other _____

Other _____

2) Find out how others view you.

Talk to three of the people on your list. Ask why they love and value you. Write their answers here.

a) Whom did you talk to?

What did he/she have to say?

b) Whom did you talk to?

What did he/she have to say?

c) Whom did you talk to?

What did he/she have to say?

Building Your Support System

It will be much easier to overcome your problems with the support of others. Some people feel that one person, like a spouse or significant other, should provide all the support they need, but developing a support network is preferred.

This worksheet can help you think about people who can support you in various areas of your life. If you have difficulty thinking of people, think of people who could *possibly* fill this role, and then work toward making this happen. Often, you'll find you can get the support you need by just asking for it.

Write down at least one person you know who fits into each category.

Someone I can discuss a personal problem with:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who enjoys similar activities:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me with a task:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can cheer me up when I am down:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who builds my self-confidence:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can give me helpful feedback:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who is a good listener and who is understanding:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can be honest with me when I make a mistake:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can keep me accountable for my decisions and goals:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me conquer bad habits:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me solve serious problems:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone I can count on to make me laugh:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can comfort me in a time of loss:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can care for me when I'm ill:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who will be proud of my achievements and let me know it:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

How Do You Want to Be Treated?

When you are working to overcome a psychological problem, you will almost always make more progress when you reach out to others. But will your friends and family provide you with the kind of support you are looking for? The odds of this happening are increased when you are clear about what you want and what you don't want. Use this worksheet to think about the ways you want to be supported, and make sure that you communicate this clearly to the important people around you. You can even show them this worksheet to get the conversation started.

What I don't want from others:

- To be blamed for something I cannot help
- To be told to just "get over it"
- To be told to just "cheer up"
- To be told "other people have it much worse than you"
- To be made to feel like I am a failure
- To be treated like a child or like I have some kind of disease
- To be deserted

Other things I don't want from others:

What I do want from others:

_____ Kindness

_____ Compassion and empathy

_____ Respect

_____ To be listened to

_____ Patience

_____ Safety

_____ Reassurance

_____ Physical contact

_____ To be treated normally

_____ Acceptance

_____ Help with my responsibilities

_____ Encouragement

_____ Companionship

_____ Presence

_____ Extra attention

Other things I want from others:

Other thoughts about how people can support me:

CREATING A PERMANENT CHANGE

What Has Helped You?

Personal change can be a long and sometimes unexpected process. You can find solutions to your problems and conflicts from sudden insight or by following a carefully crafted plan. You can find help from working with your therapist and also from books, friends, and things you see on the Internet and social media, and much more.

Whatever your process of discovering solutions to your problems and conflicts, writing down what you have learned will be an important part of making lasting changes.

This worksheet is designed to help you think about what has helped you along your journey to overcome your problems. Take some time, at least once a month, to fill in the worksheet. You will likely find added benefit from sharing it with your therapist or a close friend. Of course, you can also use this worksheet more frequently. Using it more frequently may be helpful in times of stress and during difficult life transitions.

Today's date: _____

Specific skills I learned in therapy:

Specific insights I have gotten from therapy:

Books that have helped me (*be specific about what has helped*):

Things that have inspired and motivated me (e.g., quotes, people, events, activities, etc.):

Decisions I made that could help me with future choices:

Spiritual practices or spiritual moments that have guided or inspired me:

Changes in my habits that have made a difference:

Other things that have helped me:

After reflecting on what has helped you, what is the one thing you think made the most important positive impact?

Overcoming Setbacks

Overcoming depression takes a lot of work, and you may experience setbacks for a variety of reasons. Don't be upset if you have a setback in dealing with your depression. Setbacks are common because stress and change in your life are constant. And don't let setbacks give you the feeling that you are back to where you started. Setbacks are temporary, just a sign that you need to pay attention to the kind of life you want to live every day.

The easiest way to avoid setbacks is to prepare for them. Filling out this worksheet will help you think about the kinds of things that can cause a setback and recognize the early signs that your depression may be recurring. Answer these questions thoroughly and honestly.

Write down the most likely situations that could cause a setback.

What are some specific triggers—including people, places, thoughts, and behaviors—that might cause a setback?

What are some early signs that might mean you are having a setback?

Write down two or three people you can ask to tell you if they see early signs of a setback.

Have you started doing anything to avoid situations that contributed to your past depression?

Have you started doing anything to mask your depression (e.g., drinking, taking drugs, or other escapist behavior)?

Have you had any changes in medication that might be affecting your mood?

Are you having negative thoughts about yourself that you know are not really true? What are they?

What are the most effective skills you learned to deal with your depression?

What is the most important thing you can use if you see an early sign of depression?

Make a list of at least five things you can do to avoid having a setback:

Keeping Track of How Medication Affects Your Depression

Many people decide to take medication to help with their depression, but they are often under the misconception that this will provide quick relief. In fact, while there have been many advances in psychopharmacology, finding the right medication to help you with your depression will almost always take some time.

There are different types of medications that help with depression and the anxiety that frequently accompanies it. Often, medications are used in combination, and it takes time and patience to figure exactly which combination of medications will work best for you. Unfortunately, there is no simple formula that will guide a physician to give you the exact medication that will help you with your depression.

Keeping track of how you feel and function is really the only way for your prescribing physician to know which medications will help your depression. Use this worksheet to keep track of your prescription and non-prescription medication, and bring it with you whenever you consult a medical doctor.

It is important to remember that depression can also be a side effect of medications that you take for other purposes. Oral contraceptives, drugs that treat high blood pressure, drugs that treat high cholesterol, and even certain medications that treat acne can trigger a depressed mood. Always consult with your physician and pharmacist about the side effects of your prescription and non-prescription medication and ask how they can possibly affect your mood.

Keeping Track of Your Medication

Use this sheet to keep track of how your medication affects you, and share it with your prescribing physician.

Date	Medication	Dosage	Time Taken	Side Effects	Mood

Notes

Use these pages to keep notes on what is helping you overcome your depression or the obstacles that you encounter. You may also want to keep a separate journal of thoughts.

Overcoming Depression

Depression is often called the “common cold” of mental health problems. Almost all of us will experience at least a mild depression from time to time, and an estimated one-third of adults will experience a significant depression in their lifetime.

The skills and behaviors you will learn in this workbook can quite literally change the way your brain works. There are hundreds of studies that show us that when people practice certain behaviors, the complex mix of biochemicals in their brain can change. These activities can increase the biochemicals that we associate with a sense of well-being, including serotonin (calmness and contentment), oxytocin (love and connection to others), dopamine (pleasure), and endorphins (relaxation and positive feelings). As you practice the exercises in this workbook, you will be actively stimulating the biochemicals that can help you overcome your depression and lead a happier more fulfilling life.

The assignments include:

- Imagining Your Best Possible Self
- Finding Awe
- Creating a Personal Mission Statement
- Using Your Signature Strengths
- Focusing on Positive Feelings
- Loving Kindness Meditation
- Things You Can Do to Lift Your Spirits
- Giving Up Negative Judgments About Others
- Focusing on Solutions Rather Than Problems
- Solving Your Problems One Step at a Time
- Developing Your Nurturing Inner Voice
- Dealing with Shame and Guilt
- Breaking the Cycle of Stress and Depression
- Accepting Unpleasant Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings
- Increasing Flow Experiences
- Practicing Compassionate Self-Care
- Creating a Better Day
- Seeing How Others Value You
- Building Your Support System
- How Do You Want to Be Treated?

About the Author:

Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D., is an internationally known psychologist and author whose books have been translated into 28 languages. Dr. Shapiro is best known for his innovative and practical approaches to treating mental health problems.

About the Series:

Between Sessions Resources produces a variety of tools to enhance the effectiveness of psychotherapy and counseling. This workbook is part of the company's ongoing efforts to standardize the treatment of both common and uncommon mental health problems.