

Getting active to beat depression

When you're depressed, it can be hard to find the energy or motivation to get stuff done. Even things like getting up and getting dressed in the morning can be a struggle. However, it's often the case that the less you do, the worse you feel.

But there are things you can do - step by step, day by day - that will help you deal with these feelings.

Have a think about what you've been doing over the last two weeks. Have you:

1. Avoided doing things that usually make you feel good?
2. Done less of the things you normally enjoy?
3. Avoided hanging out with your friends and family?
4. Stopped any regular exercise?

If you've answered YES to one of more of these questions, there are things you can try to help yourself feel better.

Make a plan

If you're feeling depressed, it's important to stay active. This doesn't mean running around 24/7 or making yourself stressed. It's simply making an achievable, low-key plan for what you're going to do each day.

These can be little things like going shopping or to the movies, talking on the phone to a friend, or completing part of an assignment. You might want to make a 'to do' list or keep a diary. It helps if you write your list the night before.

How to do it:

- Start by writing in the things you always do (get up, have a shower, eat breakfast, get to school/uni/work, etc). Then try to fill in the gaps
- Try each day to put into your plan one thing that you enjoy, and one that makes you feel like you've achieved something
- During early morning and/or late afternoon, build in some exercise (such as going for a walk or playing sports with friends). Physical activity can help prevent depression
- If you find it hard to get up in the morning, it's a good to plan to walk to school or university with someone, or meet them for breakfast over the weekend.

Try to stick to your plan, but don't get stressed if you don't get around to some things.

1. Staying active

People who are depressed sometimes feel like staying in bed all day. But it's really important to stay as active as you can. This can be as simple as getting out of the house to take a walk for half an hour. Physical exercise - including relaxation techniques like yoga - is a great way to help deal with depression.

Ideas to get active

- Go to the beach or a park
- Go for a walk, run, swim or bike-ride
- Play a sport you enjoy
- Take the dog for a walk
- Go to the gym or a yoga class
- Surf or skateboard with friends
- Draw or write, and be creative
- Go to a shopping centre or the local markets.

2. Doing things you enjoy

If you are depressed, you may lose interest or enjoyment in the things you used to love doing. This is a common symptom of depression. But if you stop doing these things, you can often feel worse. Try to include them in your daily plan.

At first you might not enjoy them as much as you did before, but that's okay. The important thing is to stay active. It's also a good idea to 'spoil yourself', and plan things to look forward to.

Things to treat yourself

- Buy yourself a present
- Take a long bath, or get a massage
- Organise a party or a holiday
- Plan a trip to the movies or a comedy show with friends
- Buy tickets to a concert or sports game.

3. Keeping in touch with others

Have you found that you are avoiding family or friends? Maybe you've stopped talking to them or doing things together? This can often leave you feeling lonely and left out. And this may mean that your depression gets worse, or that it could take you longer to get better. So even if you don't feel like it, spend time with your friends and family. Planning things to do with them can also help you out when you don't feel like doing much.

Ways to connect with others

- Invite someone over for dinner/takeaways
- Phone someone for a chat
- Send an email or text message
- Visit friends or family
- Join a club.

Where to get help:

If you want to chat about how you're feeling, or you've got any questions, you can;

Text The Lowdown team for free on 5626

Email The Lowdown team in the Chat section of www.thelowdown.co.nz. You can also ask them to give you a call back if you want to talk on the phone.

Call the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757