

TIP OF THE MONTH

Tips & Tools for Managing Depression

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Since the COVID-19 pandemic, prevalence of depression in the United States has nearly quadrupled. The percentage of US adults reporting symptoms of depression skyrocketed from 6.6% in 2019 to 24.4% in 2020.

Groups that are experiencing disproportionately higher rates of depression include women, young adults, racial and ethnic minorities, essential workers, unpaid adult caregivers, and individuals with financial vulnerabilities. (CDC, NCHS, US Census Bureau)

This month, we summarize evidence-based strategies for relating to depression, and offer a list of helpful “Do’s” and “Don’ts” for managing moods.

A useful starting place is learning to reframe your negative thoughts. The THINK Technique is an effective Cognitive-Behavioral tool for doing this.

THINK TECHNIQUE:

True? - Is this thought or belief 100% true? If not, what are the facts, and what are the opinions? Do not automatically believe your thoughts!

Helpful? - Is paying attention to this thought or belief useful to me or others? What is a more helpful way to think about the situation?

Inspiring? - Does the thought inspire me or does it deplete me? Is it constructive or destructive? What would be a more positive, inspiring or affirming thought?

Necessary? - Is it important for me to focus on the thought? Is it necessary to act on it? What would be more productive?

Kind? - Is the thought kind? If not, what would be a kinder and more understanding thought?

DEPRESSION DO'S:

- Get time outdoors in natural sunlight (30 mins daily)
- Remember you don't have to feel positive to make positive choices – mood and motivation shifts follow action
- Learn to distinguish facts from feelings and beliefs from facts
- Strive to sleep well – boost sleep hygiene; aim for 7-9 hours/night
- Get regular exercise – movement is medicine!
- Set social media boundaries
- Get and stay connected to other people – reach out!
- Learn to relax: guided imagery, meditation, visualization, hypnosis, body scans, progressive relaxation, breathing techniques (try [FEAP's 21 Ways program](#))
- Start daily Gratitude Journaling
- Create uninterrupted time for fun or engaging activities
- Be goal-oriented in important areas (realistic)
- Break things down into small, manageable steps
- Be kind and understanding with yourself – try talking to yourself like you would a friend
- Most importantly: get support, or seek professional help. **FEAP is available for free, confidential assistance at 434.243.2643 or on our [website](#).**

DEPRESSION DON'TS:

- Don't drink – avoid alcohol
- Don't judge yourself or others

- notice when you're stuck in judgment and step back to practice mindfulness
- Don't dwell on past, it's gone. But tomorrow hasn't happened yet – purposely cultivate future-focused thinking
- Don't overgeneralize or get stuck in black and white thinking – practice mental flexibility
- Don't analyze too deeply – move on
- Don't ignore reality – get the facts
- Don't ignore your own needs – self-care is NOT selfish
- Don't allow unrealistic expectations – set realistic ones
- Don't focus on curing depression or being consistently happy – focus on managing moods
- Don't leave time unstructured

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Books:

- *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Made Simple* by Seth Gillihan
- *The Depression Cure* by Stephen Ilardi
- *The Mindful Way Through Depression* by Mark Williams
- *The Upward Spiral* by Alex Korb

Podcasts:

- *Being Well* with Dr. Rick Hanson
- *Let's Talk About CBT* with Dr. Lucy Maddox
- *Ten Percent Happier* with Dan Harris
- *Think.Act.Be.* with Seth Gillihan

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