

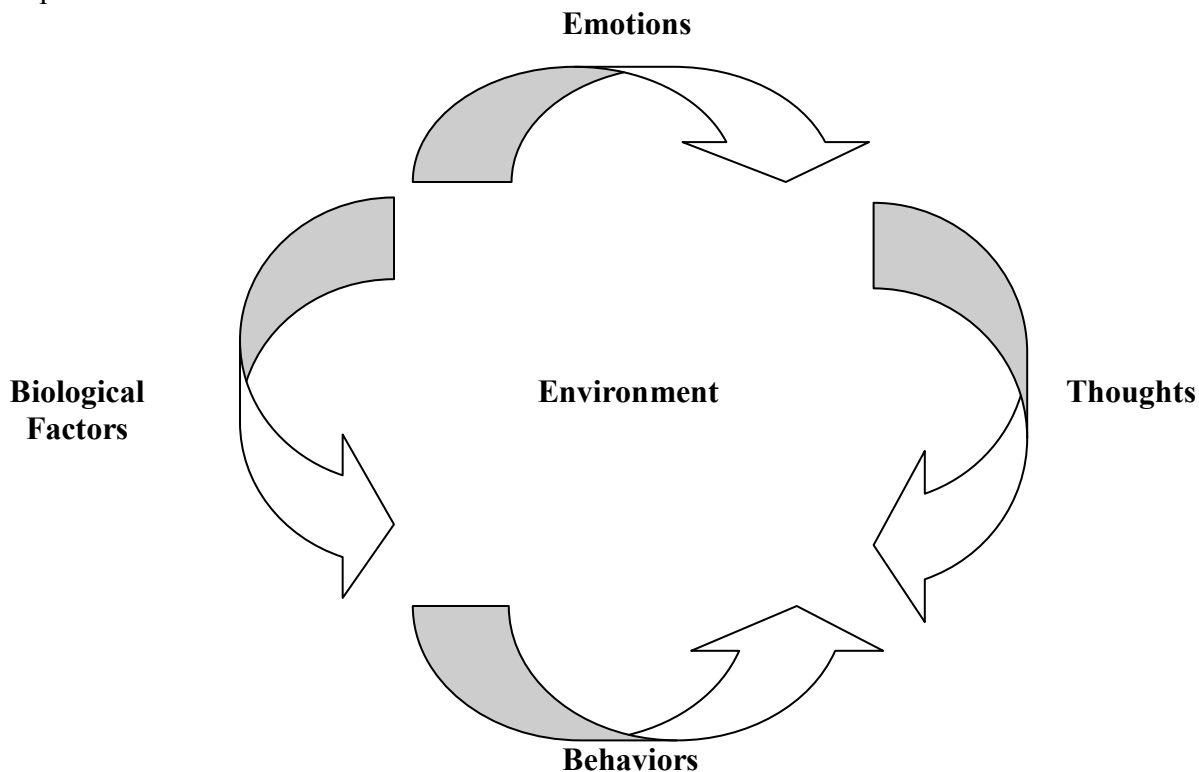
# OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

This booklet is designed to provide information about strategies for overcoming depression. It discusses a model or framework for understanding depression (the “depression spiral”) and presents an overview of treatment of depression, including use of medication and strategic coping strategies. The booklet is designed to be used on your own, or with the assistance of your Primary Care Manager or Behavioral Health Consultant.

## The Depression Spiral

The figure below depicts one helpful way to think about and understand depression. Our life experience (including depression) is influenced by a number of interrelated factors: our environment, biological factors, our thoughts and beliefs, our behaviors, and our emotions. Each factor can affect the others.

For example, Sue recently began working in a fast-paced, high-pressure job (*environmental factor*). She began to have thoughts such as “There’s no way I can get all this work done. It’s impossible. If I don’t get it done, I may lose my job.” As a result, she began to work longer hours, cut out all extra, fun activities, and withdraw from family and friends (*behaviors*). With this decrease in many of the positive, rewarding aspects of her life, she began to feel down, depressed, and more irritable (*emotions*). As the depression cycle started to take hold, she had more difficulty sleeping and concentrating (*biological factors*), which led to even more irritability and depression (*emotions*) and further withdrawal from activities and people (*behaviors*). At some point in the cycle, the balance of chemicals in her brain also began to alter (*biological factor*), which further deepened the spiral of depression.



## BREAKING THE DEPRESSION SPIRAL

As you can see, a variety of factors, including thoughts, behaviors, emotions, and environmental and biological factors can cause, maintain, and worsen depression. Fortunately, there are effective ways of breaking the spiral of depression. Since all the factors are interrelated (with one aspect affecting the others), even making small changes in just one or two areas can lead to significant improvements in other areas.

For example, Sue noticed her worsening moods and decided to take action to break the depression spiral. She focused first on one area that she felt would be easy to change: her behaviors. Specifically, she wanted to make changes in how she spent her time in the evenings after work. She made a goal of spending 30 minutes each evening relaxing and doing fun activities with her family (*behaviors*). After several weeks, she noticed that she was beginning to feel lower levels of stress and her sleep began to improve (*biological factor*). Feeling more rested and better able to concentrate (*biological factors*) increased her belief that she could effectively manage the demands of her new job (*thoughts*). She noticed that she had fewer days of feeling down and depressed (*emotions*).

Other people working to improve their depression may choose to focus initially on other areas. Some people benefit from starting an antidepressant medication (*biological factor*) to begin to break the depression cycle. Others focus first on increasing regular physical exercise (a *behavioral and biological factor* that may help decrease depression), recognizing and changing thought patterns that contribute to depression or worry (*thoughts*), or learning and trying out new behaviors to improve work or family situations (*behaviors*, e.g., problem-solving, effective communication, time management, etc.).

As you can see, there are a variety of coping methods and behavioral strategies that may be helpful in decreasing depression. It is probably not in your best interests to try all or too many strategies at any one time. Rather, keep it simple and do not overwhelm yourself. It is usually best to pick one or two strategies that sound most relevant to you, try those coping strategies for a few weeks or longer, and then move on to other coping strategies that you think may be important later on. And remember -- even if you are just working directly on one or two coping strategies, you will probably be having an indirect positive effect on other areas.

The following pages include information on how to begin four of the most effective strategies for breaking the depression spiral and decreasing depression. These are:

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Increase the rewarding activities in my life (p. 3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Take antidepressant medication as directed (p. 7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Increase physical exercise (p.8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Increase balanced thinking (p. 10)

## INCREASING REWARDING EXPERIENCES

There is strong theory and research indicating that depression may be caused or worsened by a significant decrease in rewarding experiences and activities. Therefore, one effective strategy for reducing depression may be to increase the amount of rewarding activities in your life.

There are two types of rewarding activities: “pleasurable” activities and “mastery” activities.

- **Pleasurable activities** are those that are just plain fun.
- **Mastery activities** are those that give you a sense of accomplishment or pride.

Increasing pleasurable and mastery activities may seem difficult at first. You may feel that there is *no time* in your day for any thing else. You may also feel that you have *no interest* or *no motivation* to do anything. These are common feelings and reactions in people who are depressed. It is often necessary, therefore, to *make a plan* for increasing rewarding activities, and to *stick to the plan*, even when you don’t particularly feel like it. As you begin to increase your rewarding activities, you will likely find that your motivation and interest in doing them gradually increase, as well. Use the exercise below to make improvements in this area.

**Make a list any pleasurable activities that you have decreased (or quit) doing recently:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Make a list of any mastery activities that you have decreased (or quit) doing recently:**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Now make a list of *additional* activities that you believe *might* be fun and pleasant, or might give you a sense of accomplishment and mastery.** If you have trouble coming up with ideas, consider talking with a friend, family member, or behavioral health consultant to help generate ideas. You may also find some activities that seem to “fit” you and your life from the list on the following page.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

## (POTENTIALLY) PLEASUREABLE & MASTERY ACTIVITIES

Listening to music	Taking a bath or shower	Pleasing employers or teachers
Taking a walk	Driving	Counseling someone
Knitting/sewing	Being with animals	Going to a health club or sauna
Playing golf	Going to social/church functions	Learning to do something new
Fishing	Making snacks	Complimenting or praising someone
Reading stories, novels, poems	Skiing	Going to a “drive in”
Playing with the kids	Being in a city	Thinking about people I like
Talking on the phone	Making food or crafts to give away	Being with my parents
Writing a letter	Playing pool or billiards	Having daydreams
Cleaning the house	Being with grandchildren	Kicking leaves, sand, pebbles
Straightening the office	Playing chess or checkers	Playing lawn sports
Playing cards	Putting on makeup, fixing hair	Going to school reunions
Painting	Visiting people who are sick/isolated	Seeing famous people
Playing tennis	Watching wild animals	Kissing
Gardening	Gardening, landscaping, yardwork	Being alone
Doing a crossword	Sitting in the sun	Cooking meals
Watching a movie	Just sitting and thinking	Budgeting my time
Going to church	Talking about philosophy or religion	Doing “odd jobs” around home
Visiting friends	Listening to the sounds of nature	Being at a family get-together
Playing board games	Dating	Giving a party or get-together
Going out to eat	Having a lively talk	Washing my hair
Dancing	Listening to the radio	Coaching someone
Woodworking	Having friends come to visit	Using cologne, perfume, aftershave
Exercising	Giving gifts	Talking about old times
Going for a drive	Going to school/government meetings	Having peace and quiet
Riding a bike	Getting massages or backrubs	Visiting friends
Swimming	Getting letters, cards, or notes	Writing in a diary
Playing an instrument	Watching the sky, clouds, or a storm	Saying prayers
Camping	Going on outings (park, picnic, BBQ)	Giving massages or backrubs
Bird watching	Buying something for family	Meditating or doing yoga
Going to a sports event	Gathering natural objects	Talking with people on the job
Shopping	Helping someone	Being relaxed
Working with computer	Working on my finances	Reading the newspaper
Daydreaming	Being in the mountains	Walking barefoot
Singing	Hearing jokes	Playing frisbee or catch
Watching t.v.	Talking about my children/grandkids	Doing housework or laundry
Ceramics	Meeting someone new	Being with my roommate
Photography	Eating good meals	Talking about sex
Being in the country	Improving my health	Going to a barber or beautician
Talking about sports	Wrestling or boxing	Going to the library
Going to a concert	Organizing a closet	Preparing a new or special food
Planning trips or vacations	Hunting or shooting	Watching people
Buying things for myself	Playing in a musical group	Building or watching a fire
Being at the beach	Hiking	Confessing or apologizing
Reading the scriptures	Going to a museum	Having coffee or tea
Rearranging/redecorating house	Writing papers, essays, poems	Going to auctions/garage sales
Breathing clean air	Fishing	Playing with pets
Working on machines	Doing a job well	Organizing my kitchen
Playing cards	Loaning something	Visiting a pet store
Laughing		
Shaving		
Having lunch with friends		

Use your own list of pleasurable and mastery activities to make a plan to increase rewarding experiences in your life each day.

In the morning, plan at least one pleasurable and one mastery activity for the day. At the end of the day list several things you did that day that gave you a sense of pleasure and accomplishment.

The following chart may help you get started, remain motivated and “on track,” and remind you of the progress you make.

<b>Date</b>	<b>My pleasurable activity today will be....</b>	<b>My mastery activity today will be...</b>	<b>My most fun activities today were...</b>	<b>My significant accomplishments today were...</b>

[illegible]

## USING ANTIDEPRESSANT MEDICATION

There is strong evidence that biochemical abnormalities contribute to depression. Specifically, individuals who are experiencing depression are likely to have deficits in natural body chemicals called neurotransmitters. The neurotransmitter that appears to play the biggest role is called serotonin. Deficits in neurotransmitters appears to be related to both genetic and stress factors. People who have family members with a history of depression are more likely to experience it themselves. In addition, intense and/or prolonged stress is likely to cause neurotransmitter deficits and depression.

Generally, neurotransmitter deficits are presumed to be playing a significant role in causing or maintaining depression when symptoms are more severe, chronic, or recurrent, as well as when there is a strong family history of depression.

Probably the most effective coping or corrective strategy for presumed neurotransmitter deficits is taking an antidepressant medication. Most of these work specifically at increasing neurotransmitter deficits to normal levels. Physicians decide whether an antidepressant medication may be helpful or not. If you begin taking an antidepressant medication, symptoms decrease gradually (over 4-6 weeks) and significantly (average of about 60% reduction in symptom severity). There may be some side effects—e.g., dry mouth—but side effects tend to decrease significantly over time. If you are prescribed an antidepressant medication, the most important thing you can do is to take the medication as directed. They will not work effectively when not taken as directed.

If you believe that antidepressant medication may help you, consider following these steps:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk with your PCM about taking an antidepressant. Ask any questions you might have.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Learn about potential side effects of the medication prescribed by your PCM. Your PCM or behavioral health consultant can provide you with written information about side effects and strategies for handling side effects.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take the medication as prescribed by your PCM. Contact your PCM if you have any questions or concerns about the medication.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Talk with your PCM about how long he or she wants you to take the medication. Do not discontinue the medication without talking with your PCM first.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Consider learning additional (non-medical) strategies to manage depression.

## INCREASING PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Getting sufficient exercise (and activity level in general) tends to counteract the biological causes of depression, lead to improvements in energy levels and motivation, and have positive impacts on thoughts and emotions.

One commonly-cited goal for exercise is striving to exercise at least 30 minutes a day, three to five days per week. However, if you are currently leading a relatively sedentary lifestyle with little regular exercise, it will be important to start slowly and gradually work up to your exercise goals. This will help you avoid “overdoing it” and suffering through muscle aches and pains and discouragement.

The first step in increasing your physical exercise is to talk with your Primary Care Manager about whether there are any medical restrictions on your exercise. Once you get the “green light” to begin increasing your activity level, you can begin to set exercise goals for yourself. Many people find it helpful to begin by setting an “overall goal” (e.g., the “large” goal that they would like to reach over a more extended period of time, such as 1 to 2 months). The next step involves breaking down the overall goal into smaller sub-goals. Here is an example of using a goal setting form to plan an increase in exercise.

### **SAMPLE: EXERCISE GOAL**

Overall Goal: *Walk briskly for 30 minutes, 3 times per week*

<b>Weeks</b>	<b>Sub-Goals</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>
Week 2	<i>Walk during lunch on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at normal pace for 15 minutes</i>	April 2
Week 4	<i>Walk during lunch on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at a normal pace for 20 minutes</i>	April 16
Week 6	<i>Walk during lunch on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at a slightly quicker pace for 25 minutes</i>	April 30
Week 8	<i>Walk during lunch on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at a brisk pace for 30 minutes</i>	May 14

After reviewing the above sample, spend some time thinking about your personal overall exercise goals. Use the following form to help set your overall goals and sub-goals for increasing exercise.

Overall Goal:

<b>Weeks</b>	<b>Sub-Goals</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>
Week 2		
Week 4		
Week 6		
Week 8		



## Exercise Monitoring Form

For each day, please indicate on the chart below:

1. The **type** of exercise (e.g., walking, jogging, biking)
2. The total **number of minutes** of exercise

		Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
<b>Sunday</b>	Type						
	Min.						
<b>Monday</b>	Type						
	Min.						
<b>Tuesday</b>	Type						
	Min.						
<b>Wednesday</b>	Type						
	Min.						
<b>Thursday</b>	Type						
	Min.						
<b>Friday</b>	Type						
	Min.						
<b>Saturday</b>	Type						
	Min.						

## INCREASING BALANCED THINKING

There is strong theory and research indicating that overly negative thinking may cause or maintain depression. As discussed earlier, our thoughts, or “self-talk,” are one of the interrelated factors in the depression spiral that can influence our emotions, behaviors, and biology (see p. 1). One very successful and effective treatment for depression is called “Cognitive Therapy.” It focuses on increasing “balanced thinking” by changing thinking from being excessively negative to being more positive, realistic, or balanced.

Shifting our thinking from overly negative thoughts to more positive, realistic thoughts can be difficult to do. The information and exercises on the following pages are provided to help increase your understanding of the role of your thoughts in depression, and to improve your ability to balance your thinking.

### Accurate vs. Distorted Beliefs

- ❖ ACCURATE BELIEFS AND SELF-TALK can enhance your ability to maintain a positive perspective and mood, and to minimize the negative physical and emotional consequence of a situation.
- ❖ However, sometimes thoughts can be INACCURATE, UNREALISTIC, or DISTORTED. When someone is depressed he or she often primarily looks at the *negative* side of things. He or she may just focus on *one side* of the issue and ignore other ways of viewing the situation. This can lead to worsening of depression.

For example, imagine how you would feel if you were given a task to do and you had thoughts like:

- ☹ I’m never going to get this work done.
- ☹ I’m terrible at this kind of thing.
- ☹ I’m sure I’m going to just mess it up somehow.

Most people would feel *miserable* if they had these beliefs.

- ❖ We are suggesting that it might be helpful to look at *all* the angles - negative, positive, and neutral. This may lead to different conclusions and different emotions. We are not suggesting that you should look at the world with only “rose-colored glasses,” but dark tinted glasses are not helpful either. Instead, the goal is to wear *clear* glasses, which will help you see the world more accurately.
- ❖ If you have been monitoring your depression, you may have noticed that there are patterns of situations that contribute to your feeling more depressed. Developing a list of more positive or realistic, balanced thoughts or perspectives to use in these times or situations can be helpful.

## ***Increasing Balanced Thinking: An Example***

The following example may be helpful in illustrating the way that distorted, negative thinking may contribute to depression, and how more balanced thinking may help decrease feelings of depression:

Peter noticed that he consistently felt more depressed and “down on himself” after someone was critical towards him. He realized that this was a pattern both at work (with his boss) and at home (with his wife). He discovered that when he believed others were upset or disappointed with him, he began to have overly negative thoughts about himself, which led to feeling more depressed.

To help himself develop more balanced thinking, Peter spent some time writing down the negative thoughts he typically had in situations when others had been critical of him. Here is his list of some of his negative thoughts after being criticized by his boss:

- I'm always getting criticized at work. I'm horrible at my job.
- I will never get promoted.
- I'm such a loser.

Next, Peter spent some time developing a list of more realistic, balanced thoughts specifically focused on addressing the theme of criticism from others at work. This allowed him to prepare ahead of time for these difficult situations. Here is his list of more balanced thoughts:

- I can't always please everyone
- I can use critical comments to improve my performance next time
- No one is perfect
- I did the best I could
- I can't control what my boss thinks; What matters most is what I think

Peter wrote these balanced thoughts down on an index card and carried it with him. He pulled it out and read it to himself whenever he noticed himself falling into the negative thinking trap after being criticized by others. Eventually, these “new” balanced thoughts began to replace his prior negative thoughts. This strategy helped Peter develop more balanced thinking and break his spiral of depression.

## ***Balancing Your Own Thinking: An Exercise***

The following questions are designed to help you begin the process of balancing your own thinking to decrease depression.

- 1. What situations are you feeling really depressed about at this time in your life? What types of situations or experiences tend to increase your level of depression?**
  
- 2. What negative thoughts do you tell yourself about these situations or experiences?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. What are some realistic or balanced thoughts about these situations or experiences? Develop as many realistic or balanced statements as possible and list them here.**

*If you find that you're having a difficult time developing more balanced thoughts, you might want to consider asking a trusted friend or family member to help you with the above exercise.*

*In addition, asking yourself the following questions may help you develop more balanced, realistic thinking:*

- *Is it really that bad?*
- *Am I viewing the future of this situation in an overly pessimistic way?*
- *Can I handle this? Can I cope with it more effectively?*
- *What positives might come from this situation?*
- *Will the situation always stay this bad? Will it pass or lessen at some point?*
- *How could it be worse? How is it in fact worse for others?*
- *What difficult situations have I dealt with before?*
- *Is it really that hopeless?*

4. From your responses on Question 3, select the balanced thoughts that seem most helpful and meaningful to you. Transfer these balanced thoughts onto the following “cards” that can be cut out and carried with you for easy reference during times when you notice yourself falling into prior negative thinking patterns.

<p><b>Negative Thought:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Balanced Thoughts:</b></p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> <p>4. _____</p> <p>5. _____</p>
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<p><b>Negative Thought:</b> _____</p> <p><b>Balanced Thoughts:</b></p> <p>1. _____</p> <p>2. _____</p> <p>3. _____</p> <p>4. _____</p> <p>5. _____</p>
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## ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES....

There are many other strategies (not discussed in detail in this booklet) that may also be helpful to you in breaking the spiral of depression. The Talk with your PCM or behavioral health consultant about whether you might benefit from learning strategies to decrease depression in the following ways:

\_\_\_\_\_ **Adopt additional biologically-based strategies to decrease depression:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Eat a diet high in nutritional value.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Abstain or cut down on alcohol use.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Increase amount of daily sunlight.
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Get sufficient rest.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Increase problem-solving skills** (becoming more *solution-focused* and *coping-focused* versus problem focused.) to address specific difficulties in my life

\_\_\_\_\_ **Develop my sense of meaning, purpose, and/or spirituality**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Communicate more effectively and assertively with family, friends, or co-workers**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Increase the quality of my relationships with the important people in my life**  
(e.g., relate more empathetically to them, work on pleasing the important people in my life and appreciating the things they do for me)

\_\_\_\_\_ **Work on accepting losses and hurts and “moving on”**

If you or your medical providers believe you might benefit from making any of the above changes, your behavioral health consultant can work with you to develop specific plans and strategies to address these areas.