

# Depression

Depression can happen to anyone! One in four of us will have significant depression during our life. Our biological make-up, upbringing or reaction to life events can all add to depression.

Depression is often maintained by how we think and what we do. Changing our thoughts and actions can make a positive difference. This is true whether you take medication to help with depression or not.

## How does depression affect us?

As well as the emotion of sadness, depression affects our thoughts, our physical being and our behaviours.

### Thoughts

People who are depressed often think very negatively about many things. It can be like seeing life through 'gloomy specs'. Thoughts like 'nothing can change', 'I'm worthless/useless', 'it's my fault', 'the world is terrible' and 'everything goes wrong' are common.

### Physical sensations

People who are depressed often experience the following:

- Tiredness, fatigue or lethargy.
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering.
- Sleep changes (sleep more or less).
- Eating changes (eat more or less).
- Losing interest in hobbies, activities or sex.

### Behaviours

If we are depressed, we tend to do less and less. We may stop doing the things we need to do, like going to work or even getting out of bed. We particularly stop doing the things we enjoy, and that makes the depression even worse. We might isolate ourselves from friends and family.

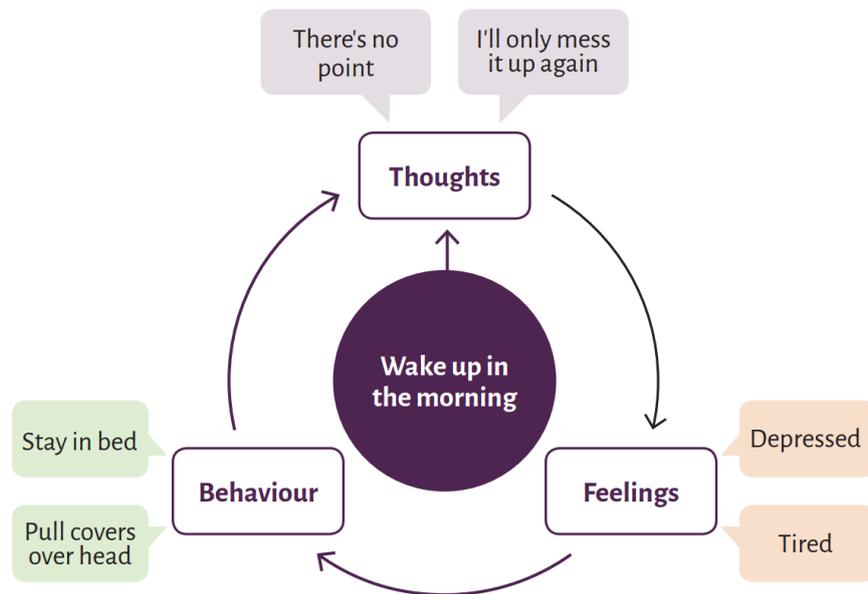
### Emotions

Depression is often accompanied by feelings such as guilt, shame, anger and anxiety.

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## Understanding depression

Depression is often caused or made worse by a vicious cycle in which negative thinking changes our emotions (feelings) and/or behaviours, and then these changes intensify our negative thoughts, making the depression more severe. The following diagram shows this cycle.



## Doing things differently to stop depression

To help stop the depression we need to turn this vicious cycle into a victorious cycle – one in which you win over the depression. This means changing how you think and what you do so the cycle makes you less depressed, not more depressed.

Doing things differently takes time and effort, but is possible! Here are some of the ways you can do this.

### Doing physical things differently

Just increasing our activity and exercise levels can greatly improve our mood. If you feel depressed, getting physically active may feel like the last thing you want to do, but it is a very important path out of depression.

- Physical exercise – walk, swim, go to the gym or cycle.
- Put on music – sing and dance along, or just listen attentively (use music that is likely to make you happier, not sadder).
- Relaxation techniques – try lots and find one that works for you.

### Doing activities differently

Doing activities that give you a balance of enjoyment, achievement and being close to others is important.

Doing more (in spite of feeling tired and depressed) often helps reduce the depression. This is sometimes called opposite action – doing the opposite of what your depression tells you to do. Following are a few examples of things you could do.

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- Choose activities which are important to you and have positive meanings.
- Do a hobby or other interest – if you don't have one, find one! What have you enjoyed in the past? What have you sometimes thought about doing but not got around to?
- Do something creative.
- Keep your goals realistic – set achievable limits. Don't set yourself up to fail! You can build up your activity over time.

## Doing self-care differently

- Regularly eating nutritious food and drinking plenty of water is important.
- Even if you aren't sleeping well, go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time every morning. If you need them, plan short rest periods during the day but avoid the temptation to spend hours in bed during the day.
- Pamper yourself – do something you really enjoy, or something relaxing.

## Doing social things differently

- Be with others – contact a friend or visit family.
- Help others.
- Talk to someone.

## Thinking differently: Changing thought habits

We have thought habits just like we have other habits. Thought habits can start depression and make it worse. Following are examples of thoughts habits that make depression worse, and alternatives that take you out of the vicious cycle of depression and into the victorious cycle of recovering.

Use STOPP! Stop, Take a breath, Observe, Pull back, Practice what works

STOPP is a useful way of using your thoughts to break the vicious cycle of depression. If you find yourself in an emotionally dark place: stop, take a deep breath and let it out, then observe by asking the following kinds of questions:



## Reflecting on your own thinking

- Write down your thoughts and feelings – get them out of your head.
- What am I reacting to? What have I been thinking about here?

## Catching problem thinking patterns

- Am I using that negative filter? Those gloomy specs?
- Am I getting things out of proportion?
- Am I expecting something from this person or situation that is unrealistic?
- Am I spending time ruminating about the past or worrying about the future?
- Am I jumping to conclusions about what this person meant? Am I misreading or reading between the lines too much? Is it possible that they didn't mean that?
- Am I just focusing on the worst possible thing that could happen? What would be more realistic?
- Am I exaggerating the good aspects of others and putting myself down? Am I exaggerating the negative and minimising the positives? How could someone else see it?

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## Reality check

- What's the worst (and best) that could happen? What's most likely to happen?
- How important is this really? How important will it be in six months' time?
- Am I putting more pressure and setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?
- Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey.
- Is this just a reminder of the past? That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now

## Thinking differently: Using your thoughts positively

In addition to changing unhelpful thinking patterns, there are other ways that your thinking can help to stop depression.

## Thinking of helpful alternatives

- What advice would I give to someone else in this situation?
- What could I do right now that would help me feel better?
- Is there another way of looking at it?
- Is there another way of dealing with this? What would be the most helpful and effective action to take? (for me, for the situation, for the other person)
- What do I want or need from this person or situation? What do they want or need from me? Is there a compromise?

## Using your nurturing mind

- Positive self-talk – encourage yourself with messages like 'I can do this, I am strong and capable'.
- Affirmations – positive statements about yourself and your abilities. Think of statements that are important and supportive. Write them down and memorise them. Say them as often as you can, even if you don't believe them at first.
- Mindfulness – learn mindful breathing
- Visualisation – breath in orange (for positive energy), and breathe out blue/black.
- Appreciation – notice the good things around you, like small acts of kindness by others, a joke with a friend, or a beautiful sunset. Keep an appreciation diary in which you list these things. Try to add entries to this diary every day.

## Keeping going

When we are going through a tunnel and are fearful of being trapped, there is no point in stopping – we need to carry on to reach the end of the tunnel. The light is there and waiting!

All of these ways of doing things differently are ways of ending your depression, but it does take time. Keeping on doing these things even if they don't seem to work straight away is very important!

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## Further information and help

- The Ministry of Health offers a directory of information and tools for general mental wellbeing <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/covid-19-novel-coronavirus/covid-19-health-advice-public/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources>
- Health Navigator New Zealand also offers a directory of information and tools for general mental wellbeing <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/healthy-living/m/mental-health/>
- The Lowdown offers information, resources and a free 24/7 helpline <https://thelowdown.co.nz>
- [depression.org.nz](https://depression.org.nz) provides information, advice and support
- Staying on Track is an e-therapy course that teaches you practical strategies to cope with the stress and disruption of day-to-day life <https://www.justathought.co.nz>
- Working through problems with Aunty Dee is a self-help tool developed by Le Va to work through problems, generate ideas and find a solution <https://www.auntydee.co.nz/>
- Melon is an app with self-help tools to help you manage emotional wellbeing <https://www.melonhealth.com>
- Mentemia is an app that you can use to monitor, manage and improve your mental wellbeing by setting daily goals and tracking your progress <https://www.mentemia.com>
- Whakatau Mai – The Wellbeing Sessions are free, virtual community events aimed at supporting wellbeing by helping you connect with others, learn and practice new skills, and start looking at things differently <https://www.wellbeingsessions.nz/>