

## 10 Things You Can Do to Counter Depression

1. Exercise - Believe it or not, when you exercise, your brain releases pleasure-inducing endorphins which reduce perceptions of pain and produce a natural high (similar to a runner's high). When you are depressed the last thing you want to do is exercise, but if you can push through it, it is a natural way to counter those blues.
2. Get adequate sunlight - Darkness triggers an increase in the production of melatonin in the body causing drowsiness. In contrast, sunlight is believed to increase serotonin levels increasing "happy feelings."
3. Take Vitamin D. A 2010 national study revealed that an increased risk for depression for individuals with a vitamin D deficiency, particularly women. Other studies show a decrease in depressive symptoms when participants take vitamin D supplements. Vitamin D is also found in fish, tofu, and milk (and of course, sunlight). *[Discuss with your doctor prior to starting any supplements.]*
4. Socialize - When we are depressed we tend to isolate ourselves, and this feeds the depression. As we withdraw from social situations, our self-worth deteriorates and the self-deprecation begins. We were created for relationships, and we need others to help us during times of depression.
5. Get up and keep a routine - People who are depressed tend to sleep too little or too much. The tendency is to lie in bed all day. Again, this creates a vicious cycle. The more you lie in bed, the less energy you have, and the less motivated you are to get up. Fight through the temptation to lounge around; get up and do the things you would do if you were not depressed. Keeping a routine helps to break the cycle.
6. See a doctor - If your depression persists for weeks, you may want to see your primary care physician and make sure there is not a physical reason for your depression. Chronic pain, thyroid issues, hormonal issues, decreased serotonin or norepinephrine can all contribute to depression. You want to rule out any physical etiology for your depression.

7. Talk to a therapist or pastor - There are times when life is just plain 'ole difficult. During these times we may need a trustworthy person in whom to confide. Consider talking with a minister or a counselor whom you trust. They can help you to process your thoughts and feelings, give you tools to counter your depression, and offer added support so that you no longer feel alone.

8. Replace negative thoughts with positive ones - Depression is usually coupled with negative thinking. In order to stop our stinkin' thinking, we have to identify our irrational thoughts and beliefs about ourselves and counter them with true statements. For example, "My family would be better off without me," could be replaced with "If I was not here, my family would be very sad and would miss me." Another example is "I cannot do anything right." Replace this thought with "There are things I do well. I work well with children; I take care of my pets..." You get the picture! Don't believe the lies that often come with depression.

9. Start a list of things you are thankful for - This one is connected to #8. Instead of mulling over all that is wrong with me, I can focus on what is right. Making a list of things I am thankful for can help me to change my default setting to one of gratitude. Habakkuk, a man in the Old Testament, chose to rejoice even when things seemed bleak.

10. Do something fun! People who are depressed often experience anhedonia. This means that they no longer enjoy the things they once did. Many refrain from such activities because they believe the lie that they couldn't possibly have fun, nor does anyone want to be around them. The mind is a powerful thing. Go with an open mind and you might be surprised by the fun you are capable of. If the depression persists, consider #6 and talk to a doctor.

Depression is treatable. You do not have to suffer indefinitely. Take control of your health and be proactive about reducing your depressive symptoms. Pray and ask God to help you to return to a place of joy and contentment. Don't give up! Joy comes in the morning.

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