

# Beating the Blues

*Depression is one of the most common problems people face today. And yet very few people know how to deal with it.*

*Depression is an emotional state of feeling sad, lonely, and dejected, a state that can be either a temporary “down” mood or a lingering, debilitating, unshakable feeling that life is futile. It is often accompanied by fatigue, headaches, and other physical symptoms. If you are suffering from mild depression, this publication will give you information that can help you lift yourself up from these feelings. But if you or someone you know is despondent or despairing, professional help is needed.*

All depression is not the same. We might consider at least three different levels:

1. **Discouragement** is a mild form of depression that the vast majority of people experience from time to time, often referred to as *the blues*.
2. **Despondency** is a more serious form of depression that may last for rather long periods of time. It is accompanied by a sense of apathy, sorrow, and distress and perhaps by a great deal of self-pity. People with this level of depression may cry a lot.
3. **Despair** is the most serious form of depression. It is an ever-present part of a person’s life. Any sense of joy or happiness is completely gone, and a sense of total hopelessness and loneliness sets in. Those suffering from depression at this level will

likely withdraw from others and become very passive. People who seem to be suffering from depression this severe should be urged to see a doctor or health-care professional. Their condition could be dangerous to themselves and others. Furthermore, prescription drugs and treatments are available that may relieve some of their suffering and, perhaps, help them overcome it.

Depressive disorders affect approximately 19 million American adults at any given time. They were known to have afflicted the likes of Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway.

All of us feel depressed at times. But we do not have to let this mild depression get the best of us. We can learn ways to change our depressed moods—and let them go. If we experience chronic, serious depression, we can find help.

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## How do you know if you are depressed?

The following signs are indicative of a depressed person, according to the National Institute of Mental Health:

- *Unhappy feelings*—Feeling sad, hopeless, worthless, discouraged or listless.
- *Negative thoughts*—“I’m a failure!” “I’m no good!” “No one cares about me.”
- *Reduced activity*—“I just sit around and mope.” “Doing anything is just too much of an effort.”
- *People problems*—“I don’t want anybody to see me.” “I feel so lonely.”
- *Guilt and low self-esteem*—“It’s all my fault.” “I should be punished.”
- *Mental agitation*—Hostility, irritability, fear, worry, and an inability to concentrate.
- *Appearance*—Sad face, slow movements, unkempt look.
- *Physical problems*—Sleeping problems, either too much or not enough; weight loss or gain; decreased sexual interest; headaches.
- *Suicidal thoughts or wishes*—“I’d be better off dead.” “I wonder if it hurts to die?”

If you or someone you know is even mildly depressed, some of these signs will be present. However, sometimes these same signs accompany an illness or an injury. If you suspect you are ill or hurt, see a health-care professional.

## You have the power to change

There are steps you can take to rid yourself of “the blues” or of depressing thoughts and feelings.

- *Ask yourself these questions.* Do I really want to change? How does being depressed benefit me? If I let go of my depression, what payoff would I get? If I were not depressed, what would I be doing? What do I need from life that I am not getting?
- *Find one thing you like about yourself and think about it.* Often the basis for our feeling depressed is the fact that we do not like ourselves. What we need to do is start liking ourselves. If you have trouble with that, think about the fact that you are still alive. You have come this far in life. You are still here. You have a valid ticket to be here now, to be alive. And that is great.
- *Get busy doing things you enjoy,* like being with a friend.

- *Make a “serendipity” file.* It is almost certain that at some time in your life, people have said they like something about you. Jot down that positive comment on a scrap of paper, and put it in a box or file. Add any letters or cards from people who let you know they appreciate you. You can add to your collection at any time. Then, when you feel down, look in your serendipity file, and let yourself enjoy the compliments you have received from others.
- *Make a list of things you like about yourself.* Think about and enjoy your positive assets and accomplishments.
- *Attend to your spiritual nature.* Tuning in to someone or something greater than our physical selves provides additional strength, courage, and hope for many people.
- *Pamper yourself.* Spoil yourself a little. Take a soothing, hot bath for 30 minutes while listening to your favorite music. Take a leisurely walk. Lie under a tree, and experience nature all around you. Have a cup of hot chocolate.

What else can you do to pamper yourself? Close your eyes and think for a while about some nice things you can do for yourself. Remember: Taking proper care of yourself allows you to be more sensitive and loving to all those around you.

## More hints for winning the depression battle

- Make a short “To Do” list of activities you can succeed at today. Break them down into manageable steps if that helps.
- Think of ways you can improve your health, and start doing some of them.
- Ask for what you want—you might get it.
- If your health allows, run, jog, walk, or swim with a friend.
- Help someone else. Doing things for others will help you not to concentrate on how you feel.
- Make play a high priority.
- Reach out and touch someone else. Join a club or support group. Reach out to someone who is lonely. Give away a dozen smiles.

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## When should I seek help?

### Seek help if you ...

- Are thinking about suicide.
- Are experiencing severe mood swings.
- Think your depression is related to other problems that require professional help.
- Think you would feel better if you talked with someone.

## Where should I go for help?

- Your physician is the best place to start—he or she can determine whether medication might help and/or recommend a good therapist.
- Consult your county mental health department.
- See your family service agency.
- Talk to a trusted clergy person.
- Look in the yellow pages of your phone book for qualified counselors, marriage and family therapists, or mental health professionals.
- Ask for recommendations from any trusted friends or family members who may have sought help for depression.

## Let go of your depression

Life is too short to be miserable, and the good news is that we don't have to be. Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, "A man is about as happy as he makes up his mind to be." Much of the mild depression we sometimes experience can be eliminated by our attitude and a strong desire to let go of being depressed. Rather than focus on the problem, concentrate on the solution. Don't dwell on the depression, dwell on the actions you will take to come out of the depression.

## References

- National Mental Health Association (1999). *Depression: What you need to know*. NMHA Pamphlet #248: Alexandria, Va.
- National Institute of Mental Health (2000). *Depression research at the National Institute of Mental Health*. NIH Publication No. 00-4501: Bethesda, Md.
- Tucker-Ladd, Clayton E. (1996). *Psychological self-help*. Mental Health Net: Dwight, Ill.
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## Internet resources

American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/>

National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association

<http://www.ndmda.org/>

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

National Mental Health Association

<http://www.nmha.org/>

To find a free depression screening facility near you go to the National Depression Screening Day's website at <http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/depression.htm>

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