

We all feel sad, unhappy, disappointed, frustrated, irritable, or just plain grumpy some of the time. These emotions can occur with everyday life events, as well as during unexpected challenges. Often, you can improve your mood by making some small changes, such as resolving a problem, talking things through with someone, or getting more sleep and/or exercise. It is when you feel a low mood for more than a few weeks, or think poorly of yourself often, and stop doing your usual activities that you should think about seeking help.

If you feel...

- Sad or down most of the time
- Angry more often than usual
- Unable to relax or to stop thinking about the same thing over and over
- Guilty, worthless, indecisive, and miserable

If you think...

- “I’m a failure”
- “I’m useless”
- “Nothing good ever happens to me”
- “People would be better off without me”

If you have stopped...

- Leaving the house
- Attending work or university
- Doing previously enjoyed activities
- Connecting with family and friends

If you are...

- Tired all the time
- Sick and run down
- Eating differently
- Experiencing headaches and muscle pain
- Unable to concentrate

...seek help.

Talking through your thoughts and feelings can help bring clarity and understanding to what is going on for you, and help identify skills and actions that can help you resume living life to the fullest.

Experiencing low mood and depression

Stay connected. Call a friend or family member, but also try to meet someone face to face. Organise a get-together to the movies or a meal. Try to keep up with social activities even if you don’t feel like it. Volunteering in the community or caring for a pet can also help you to feel connected.

Exercise daily. Go for a walk or jog, swim, ride a bike, take a yoga class. Rhythmic exercise that uses the arms and legs is good for depressed feelings.

Do things that make you feel good. Schedule in time to relax and energise yourself. Schedule a fun activity into your day, listen to music, have a long hot bath or shower, go out with friends, do something creative, or visit the museum or art gallery. Spend time outdoors.

Eat well-balanced meals. Don’t skip meals, it’s important to eat well. Minimise sugar and refined carbohydrates. Boost vitamin B with eggs, leafy greens, citrus fruits, beans and chicken. Omega 3 found in fatty fish like salmon, tuna and sardines can also boost mood.

Get enough sleep. Good, regular sleep of eight hours a day helps keep mood balanced.

Practice relaxation and mindfulness. Try yoga, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, meditation or some simple mindfulness techniques. For more information see the Relaxation, mindfulness and meditation information sheet.

Challenge negative thinking. Take note of your thoughts when you’re feeling low. Is this depression talking? Are these thoughts irrational and pessimistic? Is there another way of looking at this? Is this fact or opinion? How would others see this? Depression puts a negative spin on everything, including the way you see yourself and your expectations for the future. Have a list of positive thoughts and affirmations to remind yourself of a more rational perspective. Keep a journal each day – write down three positive things that happened today, and three things you are grateful for.

Defuse from your thinking. Learn techniques that help you be less influenced by your thinking. Your thoughts are just words and pictures in your mind – you don't have to believe them or base your actions on them all the time. Be selective about when you choose to “tune in” to your thoughts, and when you choose to “tune out”!

Practice smiling. A fake smile begins to work its magic on the brain until the smile becomes real. Limber up your face to counter the sombre effect of depression, and feel better about yourself in the process.

Access your higher self. Help someone else, such as your neighbour, or volunteer for a community group. Get in touch with, and use and share your values and strengths.

Create a routine. Structure helps make life predictable. Make a plan for your day and week. Include regular times for getting up and going to bed, healthy eating, exercise and the things that make you feel good. Include work and study in achievable “shifts” of time with regular breaks.

Set achievable goals. Don't overwhelm yourself with lofty ambitions. As the old saying goes, 'You can only eat an elephant one bite at a time.' The same thinking should apply to improving your mental or physical health. Set “bite-sized” goals each day, write them down, and tick them off!

Problem-solve. Set aside some time in your schedule to problem solve. Identify clearly the

problem that's worrying you, seek more information if needed, identify options to resolve the problem, identify a solution that will work best for you, and set yourself some actions. Remember the “bite-size” rule!

Reward yourself. Implement a system of rewards to give yourself when you've accomplished a goal including achieving one of these tips! Self-care activities — such as a massage, a new haircut, a movie, or any other activity that makes you feel good and follows your tips for recovery — make good rewards.

Talk to someone. Tell friends and family you're not feeling okay, and let them know how they can help you. Talk to a doctor or counsellor for professional help.

If your low or depressed mood persists always seek professional help. If you are concerned about a friend or family member, look for the signs of depression, talk with them about what's going on, listen to their experience, and seek help together.

Support is available to you. Contact JCU Student Equity and Wellbeing to talk with an advisor or to book an appointment with a counsellor. Alternatively, contact your GP or doctor, or other mental health professional. Support is available 24 hours a day from Lifeline (Phone 13 11 14) or Headspace (if you are under 25; Phone 1800 650 890).

Further information and support

- My Depression Team – The social network for those living with depression
<https://www.mydepressionteam.com/>
- Headspace Information Sheet – Depression
<https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/supporting-a-young-person/depression/>
- Beyond Blue – What is depression?
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/depression>
- Lifeline – Causes and signs of depression, helpful tips to addressing depression
https://www.lifeline.org.au/media/0jsl1fs2/rev1_ll-4pp-fact-sheet_depression.pdf

Low mood and depression

- Headspace – Understanding and dealing with depression – for young people
<https://headspace.org.au/young-people/understanding-and-dealing-with-depression-for-young-people/>
- Centre for Clinical Interventions 'Back from the Bluez' Online Modules
http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/infopax.cfm?Info_ID=37
- Black Dog Institute 'myCompass' – a free online, interactive self-help program designed to address mild to moderate symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression
<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/getting-help/self-help-tools-apps/mycompass>

Student Equity and Wellbeing

James Cook University

Web <https://www.jcu.edu.au/student-equity-and-wellbeing>

Email studentwellbeing@jcu.edu.au

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