

Heads Up – Bipolar Disorder

What helps? – Depression Specific Coping Strategies

Tackle isolation. Spend time with friends/ family

Episodes of low mood or depression are often accompanied with a desire to withdraw from friends and family resulting in increased isolation. Although this is understandable when feeling depressed, the unintended consequence of withdrawing is increased loneliness and a loss of the positive aspects of being around others. It can result in too much time to dwell on or think about problems as well as missing out on valuable support, company, distraction and fun. All these factors therefore exacerbate depressed mood.

There is no easy answer to this. It is important to try to keep up some social contacts, to confide in people you trust about how you are feeling and to seek support. Isolation can exacerbate depression and social contact and support can help. It's important to continue to spend time with others even if you don't feel like it.

Rumination and worry

Repeatedly dwelling on feelings, problems, and difficulties is an important process in contributing to and maintaining low mood and depression. People often report that rumination is habitual, that it occurs without conscious intent, that it often starts before they are even aware that they are doing it, and that it is very difficult to control.

The first step in tackling worry and rumination is challenging beliefs you may have that this will help in some way. For example sometimes people believe that ruminating will help them to solve a problem or worry helps them to prepare. You can use the above thought challenging guidance to help with this. Try to think about what happens when you ruminate, what effect does it have on you/ your mood? Have you ever genuinely solved a problem this way?

Typically rumination is like being stuck on a circular underground train – going round in circles, but never really getting anywhere. Rumination keeps your attention focused on the worry, makes it seem bigger in your mind and makes it difficult to keep things in perspective.

Once you have recognised the unhelpfulness of rumination, it is important to try to pay attention and notice when it's happening and make a conscious choice to not ruminate and to turn your mind to other things. If there is a problem to solve, you could try the problem solving approach briefly outlined below. You could use the worry decision tree on the attached link to help you with this:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/worrytree.pdf>

A good book on tackling rumination and worry is:
Overcoming Worry by Kevin Meares and Mark Freeston

Tackling inactivity

When feeling low, it is common to struggle to maintain your usual routines; people can feel lower in energy and motivation and therefore less able to participate in previously enjoyed activities. The unintended consequences of this are a reduction in the sense of achievement and sense of pleasure these activities provide, as well as guilt and other negative feelings about inactivity, thereby exacerbating depression.

Pushing yourself to maintain a structure and routine, even at a reduced level, will help with your mood. Sometimes it can help to keep a schedule of what you do in a day, including periods of inactivity and note the sense of pleasure and achievement you get from each activity. Look out for patterns of what scores higher or lower in terms of achievement or pleasure. Then try to schedule in activities more likely to give you pleasure (at least one thing a day) and sense of achievement. Watch out for high or unrealistic standards here; it is important to be realistic and not overwhelm yourself with too much.

<https://www.get.gg/docs/ActivityDiary.pdf>

Positive experiences

Sad films, television programmes, books and music can exacerbate low mood. Try to stay away from these during spells of low mood and seek out material that has a lighter impact on your mood.

Problem solving

Particularly during episodes of depression, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by problems, particularly if you have high or perfectionistic standards. It can help to break the problem down, brainstorm all possible solutions, choose one and write down all the steps involved. Sometimes once a task is broken down and on paper it can feel less overwhelming.