

SHROPSHIRE COUNSELLING SERVICE

Have you been diagnosed with depression?

Reduce the amount of Alcohol you consume as it increases your susceptibility to depression, even if you drink when you're happy or celebrating.

Get sociable, engage with people. Although this doesn't necessarily fight off feelings of loneliness, having a social support network can definitely help with beating feelings of depression.

Develop your interests. Before you began feeling depressed, what did you do in your spare time? Were you creative? Sporty? Musical? Artistic? I'm convinced that everyone had something they really enjoyed doing but due to time pressures or other concerns they ceased pursuing their hobby.

Aim to reduce Negative Thoughts - Your brain controls everything you do and brain activity starts with any stimulus. This can be an input from your senses (e.g. the sight or smell or sound of something) or it can be an internal thought. If you have lived in an environment where you have been regularly put down, or if you belong to a group that suffers prejudice from society, you may have come to believe that you are worthless, or that other people will dislike or hurt you. If you have such beliefs then your physical and emotional responses will be affected by them. You may want to believe that you can be happy, but your negative thoughts will trigger off a different set of messages that counteract the positive thoughts. The effect is like trying to drive a car with the brakes on. In the human body, this cuts down the flow of a group of chemical messengers called 'neurotransmitters'. These messengers carry the signals that galvanise the body into action. Over time negative thoughts can seriously affect the flow of neurotransmitters through your body and make it hard for you to respond spontaneously and happily to new challenges in life.

Reduce Stress - When human beings experience something as a threat our brain fires off a 'red alert', flooding us with chemicals that set our hearts racing, increasing our alertness and pumping blood to our muscles to enable quick movement. We also produce natural painkillers in case we get hurt. This is great for dealing with occasional threats, however, some people have to deal with serious stress on an ongoing basis. The problem with ongoing stress is that it depletes our natural painkillers and builds up stress hormones to toxic levels. This leaves us feeling exhausted, unable to sleep, jumpy, burnt out and depressed. Ask for help, be realistic in what you can achieve, organise your day and leave plenty of time for tasks will all help reduce day to day stress.

Drugs - Drugs work by artificially boosting neurotransmitter production or retention in the body.... leaving a depleted and depressed feeling as they work themselves out of your system. Taking drugs is the pharmaceutical equivalent of blowing all your money on pay day. It's great at the time but you can end up feeling pretty miserable for the rest of the week. The harder the drug the more pronounced the effect. However, anything that gives you an artificial high works in more or less the same way, whether your particular 'poison' is Crack cocaine or a double espresso with 'Death by Chocolate' cheesecake. If you're going to use drugs of any kind, be prepared for some degree of low mood to follow.

Get enough sleep - Not getting enough sleep can also raise stress hormones to toxic levels. On average people need between 7 - 9 hours sleep per night. So if you have regularly been missing out on sleep through not getting to bed on time, or if your depression is making it hard for you to sleep this can contribute to a vicious circle of tiredness and depression. **Help with sleep problems** - If you're finding it difficult to sleep, try cutting out caffeine after lunchtime, avoid stressful activities like watching the news just before bedtime, and make sure you have time to relax before going to bed. A warm, slightly sweetened milky drink will help to release the relaxing neurotransmitter, serotonin. Meditation and relaxation exercises can also help. Herbal remedies and prescribed medicines are available too if you're getting desperate.



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Depression is a cruel, malicious bully, and its most devastating weapon is that it knows you better than you know yourself. It knows how to hurt you. It is merciless and relentless.

Depression is a particularly effective and nasty bully because it's inside your head, pulling the strings. There is no escape from it. It attacks you with your own thoughts.

It's not just a mental bully. It gets physical too – headaches, nausea and all manner of other ailments that add up to more things to worry about and cope with.

What I really resent about depression, though, is how it can affect your relationships with those closest to you. When you've been used to carrying on and dealing with everything that life throws at you, it's a mean twist that you can feel like a burden to the people who love you.

That feeling of helplessness breeds further frustration and anger, making you irritable. This irritability is blended with a feeling of deadening detachment, an intolerance of noise, an inability to concentrate, hopelessness and drowsiness – a toxic blend that turns you into a drifting, zombie-

-like presence in your own home, sleepwalking through each day and staring at the ceiling at night.

And, to add guilt to the mix, you're not the only one having to deal with what's going on in your head. Your black cloud rains on your loved ones too – and depression makes sure you're painfully aware of how hard it is for them. ... And not only can you not help them with it; you know that the problem is you.

There is some good news. Depression doesn't have to win. You can beat it, and one way you can do that is to treat it like a bully and expose it. Bullies – and depression – lose some of their power if their oppressive, intimidating, secretive tactics are brought out into the open. Tell someone about it. My clients find counselling invaluable in driving depression out into the daylight. Many can find five or six sessions make a real difference.

Disclaimer: It is true that depression isn't necessarily something you can banish in an instant, however here is a set of coping strategies. These tips are not designed to replace medical advice nor take the place of anti-depressants. If you have severe depression consult your GP and if you take medication, keep taking it on the doctor's advice. Counselling can supplement medication.

Get moving. - Getting sweaty in your spare time means you'll be more likely to stave off depression than someone who doesn't" Take a walk, borrow a neighbour's dog, go out with a friend, do stretches – it doesn't have to be a strenuous work out, nor do you need to spend money on joining a gym. Research shows that even a brisk 45 minute walk each day can have a positive effect on mood. It works by getting the neurotransmitters flowing and if you're feeling slightly or moderately depressed getting out for some gentle exercise such as walking, swimming or cycling is likely to help. However, exercise

doesn't generally help people who are severely depressed, probably because they're too depleted to be able to get their energy flowing without more serious support. As a rule of thumb... try it... it's likely to help... but if it doesn't, don't beat yourself up. There are plenty of other things that will.

Fix your diet. A diet high in junk food, alcohol and smoking can cause feelings of sluggishness, feeling unwell and depression. Replacing your diet with highly nutritious food such as vegetables and fruit, whole grains and whole foods will pay dividends. Drinking fruit juice does not replace your vitamins in the same way that a piece of fruit (with all the fibre content) will. Fruit juice can lead to weight gain – it is fluid without the goodness as all the goodness has been processed away! Neurotransmitters are built up from the nutrients in the food we eat. So, if you've been eating a lot of junk food, following a very restricted diet, regularly skipping meals, or if you've been ill your diet could be contributing to your depression. In general, if you've been following, or start to follow healthy eating guidelines you should get all the nutrients you need. If you've become very depleted you may benefit from using supplements for a while. A nutritionist or dietician should be able to give you advice on this

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