

5 KEYS TO MANAGING DEPRESSION

by Sharon Martin, LCSW

HARMS

Health, Activity, Relationships, Mind, Spirit

Depression is a disease of the mind, body, and spirit. It has the potential to impact all areas of your life -- relationships, physical health, work and productivity. HARMS is an acronym I use to remind you of the 5 key areas to attend to in managing your depression.

1. **Health:** Take care of your physical health. This includes eating reasonably healthy, avoiding caffeine, alcohol and other mood altering substances, trying to sleep and wake the the same times every day, exercise, attending to personal hygiene, and taking medication as prescribed.
2. **Activity:** Get up and get out. This isn't necessarily exercise; it's trying to get out of house daily, doing purposeful activity. Just try doing something for 5 minutes to start. Getting started is often the hardest part and being active leads to more activity.
3. **Relationships:** Connect with others. People tend to isolate when they're depressed. It's very helpful to spend time around positive people. Push yourself just a little to spend time with people you like, perhaps eat dinner with your family. Try to say "hello", make eye contact, even practice smiling at strangers.

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4.. Mind: Challenge and replace negative thoughts. Distorted thoughts play a big role in depression and hopelessness. They tend to be very convincing, automatic, and pessimistic. They aren't accurate reflections of reality; they're reflections of your depression. Therefore, it's important to identify them, challenge their validity, and replace erroneous thoughts with accurate ones.

5. Nurture your spirit: What brings you joy and fills up your spirit or soul? It could be a hobby, music, prayer, meditation, or art. Think about what made you feel good in the past and give it a try. Don't expect it to be joyful right away. Depression zaps the happiness out of the most pleasurable activities, but you can gradually bring some of it back with practice.