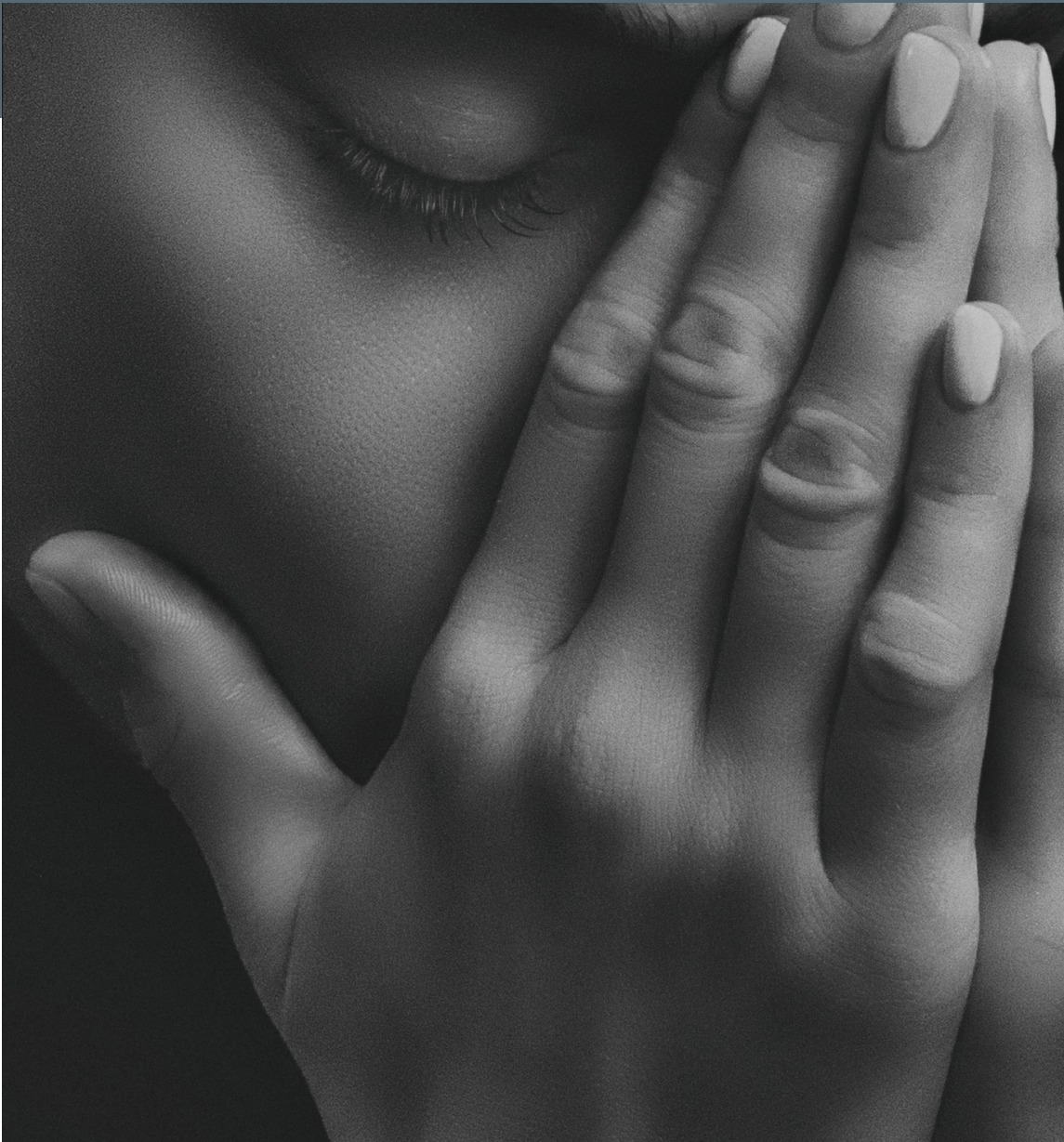


ALL ABOUT DEPRESSION: A GUIDE FOR RECOGNIZING AND COPING WITH DEPRESSION

A GOOD *place*



WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

We've all had periods in our lives where we feel sad, hopeless, irritable or poorly motivated. But at what point do these temporary feelings or behavioral patterns turn into clinical depression that requires treatment?

Sometimes when people talk about depression, they are referring to Major Depressive Disorder which is the official diagnosis. However, situational depression is also possible. This is common following an upsetting event such as a break up, losing your job, or another big life change.

In addition, depression or a depressed mood might occur as a symptom of another diagnosis, such as bipolar disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder.

In summary, there are many different ways and reasons a person might feel depressed and it can be challenging to know how to differentiate between low severity or part of a larger, long-standing issue. *In this guide, we will explore how to identify common symptoms of depression, ideas for how to cope, and some common treatment approaches.*

“Many of us are taught that we should have the strength from within to succeed no matter our circumstances or environments. Just like a plant, we need our environment to support our growth. A plant doesn't die because something is wrong with it. It's because it isn't getting enough sun or water.”

Leigh Hall, ACSW



WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION?

Common symptoms of depression include the following:

- Depressed mood (i.e. prolonged sadness or irritability that rarely abates)
- Diminished interest in activities
- Significant changes in weight and/or appetite (i.e. weight loss or weight gain)
- Insomnia (difficulty falling or staying asleep) or hypersomnia (excessive sleepiness)
- Slowing of physical movement or speaking, which is observable by others
- Fatigue or low energy
- Feelings of worthlessness (i.e. "I am no good") or excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Difficulty concentrating or indecisiveness
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

We recommend therapy if you're struggling with any of the aforementioned, **but it is especially crucial to seek help if you are having difficulty functioning in your day to day responsibilities or social interactions, or if you are having any form of suicidal thoughts.**

HOW DEPRESSION IS TREATED

There are a variety of evidence-based practices and techniques that a therapist may use to help treat depression. Many therapists may pull from a combination of approaches, but some of the most common therapy treatments for depression are:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioral therapy is a form of therapy that is focused on learning how to understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Through understanding the connection of these three areas, a person can then learn how to cognitively reframe and evaluate their thought patterns that are contributing to or fueling depressed feelings. CBT also teaches individuals behavioral coping skills for managing these difficult thoughts and feelings.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Dialectical behavior therapy focuses on teaching individuals healthy coping skills. Participants can expect to learn how to regulate intense emotions, show up more present in the moment, and improve communication in important relationships. At the center of DBT is the understanding of “dialectics” or finding balance in the opposites in life. This means that rather than seeing things through a black-and-white lens, DBT helps individuals see the grey area. The approach assumes situations are not “either/or”, but “both/and”.

Psychodynamic Therapy:

Psychodynamic therapy is all about gaining more insight into yourself. This approach to therapy takes a focus on recognizing patterns and identifying what might linger in the unconscious, which may be influencing feelings and behaviors. Psychodynamic therapy also pays focus to the past, especially childhood, in order to better understand how these past experiences have shaped the present.



COPING SKILLS TO TRY

Whether you are currently in therapy, interested in starting therapy, or would simply like some tools to use during times in which sadness or depression may come up, there are coping skills that you can do on your own to help. Try out some of these practices the next time you are feeling down!

Behavioral Activation:

This is just a fancy way to say engage in something that feels good! When feeling depressed, the last thing we want to do is get up and do something. However, by staying stagnant and avoidant, it actually feeds the cycle of depression and usually makes us feel much worse over time. So one of the most simple, but often challenging, things you can do is push yourself to do an activity you enjoy.

It can be helpful to start small, and focus on doing only one thing, rather than trying to fill your day up with enjoyable activities.

Starting small might look like going for a walk, listening to a song that makes you feel good, taking a shower, or texting a friend. On a slightly larger scale, this can include scheduling time to hang out with a friend, or doing a hobby you like such as art, exercising, or cooking a meal.

The important thing is to challenge yourself to complete the activity, embracing that you might not feel 100% good about it. Muscle memory and repetition of small behaviors like this can help jumpstart your routine again.

My favorite form of self-care is to take long walks around the city or my neighborhood taking in some breaths of air, window shopping, and stopping for a tea along the way.

Amy Warren, LMSW



COPING SKILLS TO TRY

Journaling:

When our thoughts and feelings exist only in our head, it can feel overwhelming. The thoughts can feel loud and jumbled, and you may get lost in it all. However, taking the time to express your thoughts and feelings in writing can serve as a helpful release, and also aid in making sense of it. If you're unsure of where to start, check out some writing prompts on our website. Sometimes it feels more manageable and structured to answer questions instead of free-associating.

Create a Routine:

Establishing a stable routine is great for your mental health, especially when it includes some of the previously mentioned pleasurable activities. Having a consistent routine can help create purpose, gives a sense of accomplishment when you stick to it, and encourages a sleep schedule, all of which are helpful to improve depressive symptoms!

Try writing down what your current daily routine looks like, and then see where you can create more consistency. It might take some trial and error to get into a rhythm that feels right for you, but once you've established the habits, you might notice a big improvement!



COPING SKILLS TO TRY

Getting into a habit of not listening to every single negative thought you have might seem difficult, but it's crucial in rewriting the script in your head to be more hopeful. Try these cognitive tricks the next time you find yourself repeating a negative thought or worry:

*What is the best that could happen? What is the worst that could happen?
What is most likely going to happen?*

Do I have any proof of this thought?

Where can I look for evidence against this thought?

If the worst happened, how would I cope?

“
Much of what I see and hear in the struggle for behavioral change is quick fixes and instant gratification. In reality, we often need commitment, discipline and structure with a large dose of self-compassion.

Douglas Brown, LCSW

