

# **Depression Sucks!**

## **50 Non-Medical Strategies for Coping with Depression**

**By Bob Litt**

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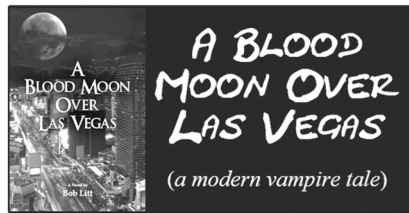
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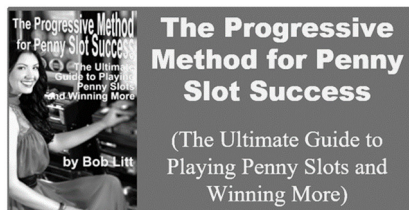


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# Preface

I hope that the 50 Strategies in this book will help you, or someone you know, cope with Depression.

You may feel the urge to jump right to the 50 Strategies, but I strongly encourage you to first read the Introduction and the section on How to Use This Book. This will give you a better overview of what you will find here.

As of this writing, this book is being sold exclusively by Amazon.

You probably know that authors, like me, love to receive your reviews.

Whether or not you purchased the printed version or the eBook, would you be kind enough to write a review.

Good reviews are more than welcome. But even bad reviews are helpful to me when writing the next version of this book.

Thank you for reading.

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# Introduction

## *(Read This)*

*Telling a depressed person to be happy is like telling a cancer patient to cure themselves.*

**– Unknown Author**

Going through depression can be difficult. Thankfully, there is absolutely no shame in seeking out medical help. But not everyone wants to go that route. Fortunately, there are some non-medical activities that can help. That's what this book is about: 50 Non-Medical Strategies for Coping with Depression.

Regrettably, depression is a way-too-common disorder that, I have to admit, I have suffered from myself. However, I have discovered that there are certain behaviors that help me to deal with this condition. My hope is that they will help you as well.

I am writing this during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020-22 (and I am writing from my own personal perspective). That alone is cause to be depressed. But I have my own reasons to feel that way, and my own problems, that I will tell you about.

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However, this morning I am feeling pretty good. I've been following my own advice: I managed to finish a large project I was working on; I just had a nap; and now I am having a comfort food snack. Compared to yesterday, I can almost say that I feel euphoric.

I feel energized and actually want to do things. I cleaned up some things in the kitchen, put away some groceries that I bought yesterday, and I am actually sitting at my desk writing.

I have no idea how long this feeling will last. From past experience I will guess that it may be anywhere from a couple of hours to a few short days.

My depression will return. I know it. Depression is always lurking just around the corner. Depression is insidious. Depression Sucks!

## ***My Overview of Depression***

---

Depression is a common mental disorder. It's estimated that 16 million adults in the United States (about 6.7 percent of the population), experience at least one major depressive episode each year.

Symptoms of depression can range from mild to severe. They can be chronic, or they can occur as one-time episodes caused by traumatic life events, such as a death or illness in the family, the ending of a marriage, or financial difficulties.

Some symptoms of depression include the following personality changes:



- Leisure activities – you have reduced interest in activities that are normally pleasurable
- Sleep patterns – you have either developed insomnia, an increased need for sleep, or you’re constantly incredibly fatigued
- Work habits – you are working long hours or not at all
- Appetite – a lack of appetite or an increased need to eat, leading to either weight loss or gain
- Energy level – lack of energy and fatigue, restlessness, irritability, or aggressiveness making you extremely sensitive to rejection
- Trouble Concentrating – even on tasks you usually perform well
- Poor Self-Image – causing you to skip self-care habits
- Your libido – too low, or in some cases overactive
- Suicidal thoughts – wishing to harm yourself or others

Any one, or two, of these (except for the last item) may be temporary reactions to a stressful situation and may change back on their own. Never jump to conclusions. If you are concerned about these types of personality changes, please ask a trained medical professional.

## ***Is it Live or is it Memorex\* - Adjustment Disorder***

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Depression is a real medical condition. Only a trained medical professional should apply that diagnosis. That being said, the word “depression” is a term that has become part of our

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common vernacular and is widely used by non-professionals to refer to anyone who is feeling down.

*\* Back in 1971, the Memorex company produced an audio cassette tape (we're talking before CDs) that they said reproduced sounds that were as good as listening to a live performance. They used the catch phrase, "Is it Live or is it Memorex?" In a ubiquitous TV commercial, they recorded the singer Ella Fitzgerald singing a note that shattered a wine glass. When they played the Memorex tape, the recording still shattered a glass.*

*The phrase, "Is it Live or is it Memorex?" came to be perceived as asking if something was real or a faked reproduction.*

While someone may actually be depressed, medical professionals will tell you that the more likely situation is that a patient suffers from what medical professionals call Adjustment Disorder.

But, as far as most people are concerned, it doesn't matter what you call it: Depression, Adjustment Disorder, Bi-Polar, being Unconsolably Sad, or simply Feeling Down. They just feel bad and are unable to cope. In this book I am using the word "depression" very loosely. I am going to take the liberty of calling all of the conditions I just listed as "Depression."

I am not a medical professional (more on that in a little bit). In this book, my goal is to try to help you to make your life more bearable by giving you 50 Strategies that (I hope) will allow you to deal with the way you are feeling.

Okay, back to Adjustment Disorder. What is it?

An adjustment disorder is a type of disability that develops after someone has been exposed to a trigger. It is a reaction, either behavioral or emotional, to a stressful event or change

in a person's life (also called a life stressor). The adjustment disorder makes it difficult, or impossible, for a person to cope with certain situations. The reaction usually occurs within three months of the stressful event. Stressors can be life changes, work-related problems, loss of a loved one, or relationship issues. People who encounter a trigger situation at work may be unable to spend any significant amount of time in the workplace due to their disability.

Adjustment Disorders can also affect children. Stressors for them can be a family move, their parents' divorce or separation, the loss of a pet, the birth of a sibling, or a sudden illness.

How common is it? Pretty common. In the United States there are more than 200,000 cases diagnosed each year. Does diagnosis require a lab test or brain scan? No.

Is it treatable? Yes, by a medical professional. How long does it take to recover? The length of an adjustment disorder can vary: 6 months or less is considered acute; more than 6 months is chronic. Symptoms should ease once the stressor is removed. Brief professional treatment may also help symptoms disappear sooner.

What are the symptoms of Adjustment Disorder?

Some emotional signs of adjustment disorder are: sadness, hopelessness, not enjoying things you used to enjoy, crying spells, worrying, nervousness, anxiety, desperation, feeling jittery, feeling overwhelmed, performing poorly in school or work, and thoughts of suicide.

## *Anxiety – Depression’s Evil Twin*

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So now you know that adjustment disorder is another condition that is mistaken for Depression. Still another, masquerading as Depression, is Anxiety.

The symptoms are very similar but there is a difference. Depression is usually caused by events in the past, Anxiety is caused by events that haven’t happened yet – the future.

(All this time I thought I was just depressed. Turns out I was wrong; I was Depressed **and** Anxious.)

When a frightening, new, unpleasant or unexpected situation presents itself, our brains appropriately raise a signal that there might be danger. This is done by the Amygdala, a part of our reptilian brain. Our basic instincts cause us to go into (1) flight, (2) fight or (3) freeze.

Number 3 is my reaction: Freezing and being unable to accomplish anything. I used to think I was lazy and just a procrastinator. But, after years of self-reflection I’ve realized that there is so much more to it.

I become overwhelmed with what needs to be done. The other side of the same coin is not being able to think of anything at all. My mind goes blank.

## *High Anxiety*

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They (who are they?) say that it is impossible to think of two things at the same time. So, what happens when your mind is sending you reminders about what you’ve experienced,

reviewing the thoughts and actions of the day, trying to prioritize what still needs to be done, making plans for the future? Can you concentrate on two things, three, five, a dozen? The answer is “no.”

In my career I have acted as a project manager. A good PM will break down the major task to be accomplished into 100 little tasks. So, when I am presented with a new project, I don’t just think of it as one task that needs to be accomplished, I think of it as dozens of things that need to be completed.

I can deal with one thing, but dozens, hundreds? It’s overwhelming. So overwhelming, that I wind up not doing anything. Of course, that makes me depressed and makes the whole situation worse.

## ***Full Disclosure***

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It’s time for full disclosure. I am in no way a medical professional. Neither have I conducted any independent research on “depression.”

What I am is an observer of life. In my career I have done a lot of business analysis. I have used those same skills to figure out things in my personal life.

Because I am not a medical professional, I use the term “depression” very loosely.

If you think you are really depressed, please see a medical professional, a psychiatrist or an analyst.

## *My Personal Depression*

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I think I've already made it clear that this is not a medical book. However, I hope it makes sense to you.

I'm pretty sure I'm depressed right now. To the "outside" world it may look like I'm lazy or procrastinating (more on that in a bit) but I know the truth: I don't feel like doing anything that I have to do.

Later today my mind will change. All of a sudden, my mind will kick into gear. I'll frantically wade through the pile of "to do" stuff on my desk to find one of my lists.

I know I need to grab the moment and actually do something.

## *A Functioning Depressive*

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I think of myself as a "functioning depressive." (BTW – I just made that up. As far as I know there is no medical term like that.)

I have to push myself to do the minimum that I have to do. But, if I wasn't depressed, I would be able to accomplish so much more.

I function, doing what I have to, but not much more than that.

When I use some of the 50 Strategies, they do make me feel better for a while, with a burst of energy, and I can do even more stuff.

## *My History*

---

I'm not sure how long I've been depressed. For certain, it has been for years, maybe a decade, or multiple decades.

For most of that time I did not realize that I was depressed. But, looking back, I know I was at least anxious, way too nervous, and way too sad.

At least I think it was depression. Sometimes it was completely debilitating. Sometimes I just felt down.

I know what triggered the worst symptoms: Loss of control, workplace politics, debt, and dealing with a family member suffering from their own depression.

My work situation was always precarious. I chose a profession where short term contracts and changing jobs often was the norm. I was good at what I did and was able to find work (usually for more and more money) but there was quite a bit of stress always looking for work.

After 9/11, work started to dry up in New York. I was out of work for a while. My wife was able to take an early retirement and we decided to move to Las Vegas.

Finding work there was no picnic and, once again, I wound up with a series of short-term positions. But, this time without the decent pay I was used to getting.

Eventually I found a position that suited my talents. I was there for ten years, then the company I worked for changed hands. When the new management came in, they tried to force their own imprint.

All the things about my work that I considered important, they didn't. It took almost a year until I had what I thought was a mental breakdown. The anxiety was overwhelming. I took a medical leave of absence.

Unfortunately, when I returned, nothing had changed. I lasted another six months before I was fired. I threatened to sue for harassment and got a decent settlement.

I got the first consulting contract, of my new career, within a few months. A year later I suddenly felt a lot better.

I've always been able to analyze myself, usually long after I needed to, and I started thinking about what I did to overcome my depression.

I finally realized that fighting depression is a constant struggle. But there are strategies I could use to cope. This book is the result.

## ***Depression and Motivation***

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Lack of motivation is another symptom of depression, but it may be caused by something else. For example, you may lack motivation if you're having a short-term difficulty coping with an issue in your life or experiencing something that affects your self-confidence.

If depression is responsible for your lack of motivation, you may find that your level of motivation is directly related to how depressed you're feeling. If you or a loved one is feeling a lack of motivation due to depression, there are ways to help improve the situation.



It may seem hard at first, but persistence will help feed the growing sense of motivation, and you will find that over time it becomes easier to get up and do things.

## *Lazy or Depressed*

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Then there are the times when, occasionally, I just don't feel like doing anything. But (here's the kicker), mentally I feel fine.

So, I turn on the TV, lay back in my favorite recliner, and enjoy the moment.

Am I being depressed – no. Am I being lazy – YES!

When you are depressed, it puts such a strain on your mentality that you become frozen and unable to do anything. But when your mind is clear, even if you don't do anything constructive, it is like a vacation for your brain.

Enjoy it. Revel in it. Hope that it lasts as long as possible. After all you've been through you deserve it.

But if you suffer from depression, chances are those feelings will come back.

So, when that wonderful, care free, lazy moment starts to end, immediately start one of the 50 Strategies in this book. You might get something accomplished and the feeling of non-depression may just last longer.

## *Discipline – The Chicken or the Egg*

---

It's going to take a bit of discipline. I know, that's one of the things you don't have when you are depressed.

The 50 Strategies in this book won't always work, and they will take some discipline on your part. But no matter what you call those feelings: Adjustment Disorder, Sadness, Bi-polar, or Depression; I hope they help you to cope with what you are going through.

All I know is that (most of the time) when I feel good, I want to do stuff. And when I force myself to do stuff, I usually feel better.

## *Other People May Help*

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A Quick Strategy: Have you ever seen the ad on TV where a depressed person holds up a mask that has a smile on it?

Actually, that's not a bad idea. If you smile at someone, say something nice, make a joke, they will usually smile back or laugh, and that can actually make you feel better.

Remember, none of the strategies in this book are long term. But if you get enough short-term positive feedback, then you may not feel so bad.

## *A Final Word: Guilt*

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If you are depressed it is probably for a different reason than anyone else. When you are depressed, you probably don't accomplish as much as you need to. For me, that makes me more depressed. Which means I accomplish even less. It becomes a vicious cycle.

I make a living writing. So, when I'm depressed:

- I don't write, then I usually don't get paid. So, I was letting my family down.
- I miss the deadlines my clients have imposed, so I was letting them down.
- One of my clients happens to be a friend of mine, so I was letting my friend down.

Oh, the guilt!

So, add all that guilt on top of my "regular" depression and I was in a very sorry state of affairs. It was so bad that even the 50 Strategies weren't helping.

But time heals all wounds and in a couple of days I was able to force myself to write again. Then a couple of days after that (it was a big project) I finished my work and I felt great! Finally!

I hope this book can make it happen for you.

The purpose of this book is to give you strategies to cope with your depression and to be able to get things done.

But when you follow some of these 50 Strategies (like taking a nap in the middle of the day) you might have to avoid doing things you are supposed to do. Then you'll feel bad about that and that will cause even more depression.

Here's my advice: Don't feel guilty! Realize that you still have things to do, you still have responsibilities, but don't dwell on them.

As a matter of fact, I was thinking of adding "Don't Feel Guilty" as one of my strategies. But it's not really a "strategy." It's hard to put it in words as something to do. It is more like NOT doing something. I would suggest practicing. It takes a little discipline but it can be done. And when that guilt is lifted off your shoulders you will definitely feel better.

\* \* \*

If you try some of these 50 Strategies you might feel better, have more energy, and be more focused. Then when you feel up to tackling those responsibilities you will accomplish them faster and better than you would otherwise.

Depression is not exactly a happy topic, so I've tried to intersperse a little humor here and there. Here's a quote about "guilt" from one of my favorite comics (he's also a pretty good actor):

*Now, I don't want to get off on a rant here, but guilt is simply God's way of letting you know that you're having too good a time.*

**— Dennis Miller**  
**American Stand-Up Comedian,**  
**Television Host, and Actor**



# How to Use This Book

## *Strategies*

---

Be aware that not every strategy will work for everyone. And a technique that works for you sometimes may not work for you all the time.

That is why I wanted to give you choices. There are 50 Strategies in this book. If ten of them work for you then you are ahead of the game.

Another reason I wanted to give you lots of strategies is that not all of you will have the resources to perform all of them:

- If you work on a regular schedule, you might not be able to sleep when you want to.
- If you have medical problems, physical activities might not work for you.
- If financial problems are a source of your depression, then trying to “Pay Bills” is not going to work for you either. Some of you just won’t have the resources to even pay one of those annoying bills that come in the mail. Owing money sucks, but trying to pay a bill, and failing because you are impoverished, is even worse.

For most of these activities it is almost impossible to be engaged and still concentrate on being depressed.

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If even one of these 50 Strategies allow you to concentrate enough to complete a project of yours, then I hope you will feel a sense of accomplishment that will help you to fight against your depression.

However, none of these Strategies are a long-term cure for your depression. They are only a temporary fix. But, if you do enough of them, for long enough, you may discover that you are (for lack of a better word) happier and better able to cope with life.

\* \* \*

It has taken me years to figure out how to deal with my own depression. But when I thought about it, I realized that there were some activities that made me feel better: A nice nap in the middle of the day; a meal that really tasted good; and chocolate. Chocolate always makes everything better.

I started making a list and eventually came up with 50 Strategies. That's what this book is all about: 50 Strategies for activities to do to help you cope with your depression.

They work for me and I hope they work for you.

(By the way, each of these 50 Strategies is written like a little essay. Some Strategies are longer than others, and the short ones are brief and to the point. Each one was probably written on a different day. So, for many, I start out by saying, "I just did this or that ...")



## *Sufferin' Succotash*

---

If there is a theme among the 50 Strategies in this book, it is not to suffer needlessly. Depression is bad enough. Why put up with annoyances when you don't need to?

You will find that some of these Strategies are a distraction that will allow you to forget to be depressed for a while.

Others deal with real suffering, for instance:

- Foot Health – If your feet hurt, you don't even want to stand much less walk or exercise.
- Gut Health – If you have gut problems, they can literally consume every ounce of energy you have.
- Pain Management – If you have real pain then you need to see a doctor. But, don't let minor pains distract you from living your life.

## *Quotes*

---

For each of the 50 Strategies, I tried to pair them up with quotes about depression. Sometimes the pairing makes sense, other times they don't. But, like all philosophies, they should be taken with a big grain of salt.

## *Little Victories*

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I was definitely in a funk the last few days. For my day job I work as a technical writing consultant through agencies that assign me to a client. I usually have to wait weeks (sometimes

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months) to be paid for my work, which is a real pain you know where.

Remotely communicating with my clients takes longer than I would like. I had finished an assignment for my client but didn't know if they were happy with my work. I was definitely stressed out and anxious.

Yesterday, after several weeks of waiting to be paid (not surprisingly a cause of depression), I found out the agency was going to send me a substantial sum of money and today I found out the client loved my work.

In of themselves not too shabby. But taken together it was what I call a "Little Victory." All of a sudden, I was walking on cloud 9.

I always say that it is never just one thing, crazy things seem to happen all at once. Well, here I had two good things happen almost at the same time and it definitely brightened my mood.

## *Combinations*

---

Then, on another day, I was feeling down, finding it hard to concentrate, had a headache and felt fatigued. So, I took some aspirin for pain management, had a comfort food snack, and took a nap. When I woke up, I felt a thousand percent better.

Maybe I would have felt better anyway. Maybe doing just one thing would have helped. But, by combining multiple strategies, they worked for me.

Sometimes the good feeling only lasts for a little while. But you know what? I'll take it. For me, there is a big difference between feeling down and feeling like I actually want to do something.

## ***Catch It While You Can***

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After trying some of the Strategies in this book, I hope you will feel better. At least for a short period of time. Take advantage of that.

When you feel better, when you have energy, do something else. Maybe try to tackle something that you've been putting off. Maybe try another Strategy and keep the good feelings going.

The more time you have feeling good, the more you will remember what it feels like and maybe, just maybe, that memory will be a good thing too.

## ***Seize the Moment***

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If, either by happenstance or because you have followed some of these Strategies, you are feeling good then run with it.

If I suddenly have energy, I know it won't last too long. But if I have a list of things to do, I can run and do them. And the bonus there is that I might accomplish something and feel good about that so the good feelings last long enough for me to do some more.

## *If You Are a Caregiver*

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A word for those of you who may be depressed because you are taking care of others. If you happen to be a caregiver for someone you care about, and they are depressed, it will be very hard for you not to become depressed as well.

Caring for someone else with a medical condition is hard work. If the other person is depressed then ratchet that up about 100 degrees.

When they get angry, upset, catatonic, how could you not be affected? All the work you put into dealing with your own depression will come back with a vengeance.

But, if you are depressed, then the important thing is to take care of yourself first. Take a moment, or two, to make yourself feel better before even attempting to deal with them.

# **50 Non-Medical Strategies for Coping with Depression**

If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Or you can text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hr support from the Crisis Text Line. (After July 2022 reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 988)

# *1. Two Steps Forward – One Step Back*

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*One swallow does not make a summer, neither does one fine day; similarly, one day or brief time of happiness does not make a person entirely happy.*

— Aristotle

**Ancient Greek Philosopher**

**“The Nicomachean Ethics”**

Depression can be sneaky, devious, even underhanded. Just when you think you have it licked, it comes back with a vengeance.

I believe I said it before, “Depression Sucks!” And, as Professor Robert Sapolsky\* of Stanford University says, it is “incredibly pervasive.” I would even use the word insidious.

*\* If you are interested in cutting edge research on depression, Professor Robert Sapolsky has done some revolutionary research in the field. He is an American neuroendocrinology researcher and author. Currently a professor of biology, and professor of neurology and neurological sciences at Stanford University. He has written numerous articles, books, delivered TED Talks and been featured on several podcasts. Many of his university lectures and interviews are available on YouTube.*

Depression is a thief. It robs you of your energy, your capabilities, your happiness. It is tireless. So, to fight it you have to be tireless too. So, the first Strategy I want to share with you is to be persistent: Depression is a tough nut to crack.

Remember that these 50 Strategies are not a permanent cure. The effects will only last so long. So, you need to keep trying.

If you've read the Introduction (you have read the Introduction, haven't you?) you know that it will take discipline.

You're fighting against whatever is causing your depression. Depression is relentless so you also have to be.

However, you need to be prepared for the fact that, as much as you try not to be depressed, it will come back.

Don't be surprised that for every step toward progress there will be slippage. Tomorrow you will have to try harder. Then the next day, harder than that.

You'll learn which of these Strategies work for you. I hope that there are enough Strategies so you'll have choices.

I sincerely hope that even the first Strategy that you try works for you. If it doesn't, or even if it does, try another, and another, and another.

Find what works for you (not every Strategy will) but keep trying others. You might even discover some new Strategies that I haven't thought of, or tried myself.

The important thing is that, when your depression returns (there's a good chance it will) force yourself to keep trying.

## *2. Aromatherapy*

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*I wondered why I couldn't go  
the whole way doing what I  
should any more. This made me  
sad and tired. Then I wondered  
why I couldn't go the whole way  
doing what I shouldn't, the way  
Doreen did, and this made me  
even sadder and more tired.*

— Sylvia Plath

**American Poet and Writer**

**The Bell Jar**

I don't know if aromatherapy really works but, smelling something that has a pleasant scent can make you happy – at least for a little while.

I used to have an expensive aftershave I really liked. Even though I didn't shave every day I would still splash a little bit on in the morning.



At one of those mall fragrance shops, I was able to buy a little bottle of a cheap version of my aftershave. It didn't last as long but it was pretty close to the smell of the more expensive brand. I brought that little bottle into my office and kept it in my desk drawer.

At that time, I had a job that was beginning to depress me. I did a lot of work by myself and, when I was feeling down, I would spray the fake scent into the air around me, close my eyes, and take a deep breath.

The aroma was delightful and oh so pleasant. I would keep my eyes closed and smile. It made me happy and a lot less stressed.

Aromatherapy is the practice of using natural oils extracted from flowers, bark, stems, leaves, roots, or other parts of a plant to enhance psychological and physical well-being.

Everyone reacts differently to aromatherapy but those who have tried it say that it sometimes helps to relieve nausea, fatigue and insomnia, pain and body aches, anxiety, agitation, stress, and depression.

Aromatherapy is thought to work by stimulating smell receptors in the nose, which then send messages through the nervous system to the limbic system — the part of the brain that controls emotions.

If you're considering aromatherapy, consult your doctor and a trained aromatherapist about the possible risks and benefits.

My advice is to try smelling different things to see if they are pleasant. Flowers, perfumes, and even varieties of tea all have scents that you may enjoy.

### *3. Make Yourself Beautiful*

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*Having depression is like  
seeing a rainbow in grayscale.*

— Hazel Strickland  
from [imagenestur.com](http://imagenestur.com)

A poor self-image can have a very strong negative effect on your depression.

Unfortunately, we all see too many magazines, movies and TV shows with beautiful people, with beautiful bodies and beautiful clothes that fit perfectly. How can you compete? (see Strategy 41 – Shave and a Haircut)

If you make the effort to make yourself look as good as you can, you may be pleasantly surprised at how good you can feel.

You are not doing this for anyone else – you are doing it for yourself.

When you look in the mirror and like what you see, you may find that it brings a smile to your face.

Use “tricks” if you have to:

Make sure you have some clothes that make you look good. Don’t worry about how they feel (tight, restricting, too formal).

If you are a woman, use undergarments that accent your figure.

If you are an overweight man, wear a shirt that doesn’t pull at the buttons which would accent your girth.

Here’s another little trick:

When you take off your makeup or your good-looking clothes, do NOT look in the mirror again. You want to remember how good you looked, how sexy, how beautiful.

For women, do NOT look in the mirror when you wipe off your makeup or wash your face.

Then put on something comfortable so that you will feel restful while you still have the memory of how beautiful you looked when you were fully dressed.

## 4. *Go to Church*

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*Losing your life is not the worst thing that can happen. The worst thing is to lose your reason for living.*

— Jo Nesbø

**Norwegian Writer, Musician, Economist,  
Former Soccer Player and Reporter**

Going to church usually means joining a special group – a congregation of people who share your religion and your beliefs.

In just a few pages, I will talk about the general benefits of becoming part of a group (see Strategy 11 – Join a Group). But when it comes to dealing with depression, suffice it to say that going to church is like joining a group, but on steroids.

Going to a church, and being around others who believe what you believe, gives you a feeling of belonging which, in itself, is very reassuring. And, if you pray, when you attend your church, there is a double benefit.

Doctors, who have studied the physiological effects of prayer, have found that when someone prays, their stress level is reduced, their heart rate and blood pressure decrease, and breathing becomes easier and more regular.

There are two general types of prayers. Both provide benefits for those who are depressed.

If you repeat the formal prayers, that your church has prescribed, the repetition can profoundly change your way of thinking:

If you have ever tried daily affirmations (“I like myself, I love my life, I will achieve my goals, today is going to be a great day”), you may have heard how repetition can actually change areas of the brain that make you happy and positive.

I think that saying a prayer over and over again is like using a mantra in transcendental meditation. Your brain starts to reprogram itself, you become calmer and more focused.

The other type of prayers are the ones that you make up as you go, such as a request for help or an expression of thanks addressed to your God. This is when you can develop a personal relationship with your God, where you have faith that an all-powerful being will be watching over you and that your prayers will be answered (hopefully in the affirmative).

That is a very comforting thought.

## *5. Cook Something Different*

---

*Being depressed is like being grounded except it's your brain ruining your life instead of your mom.*

— Unknown Author

Because I'm not that good at it, when I cook, I really have to concentrate. And, when I concentrate on one thing, I do not have time to be depressed.

First, I have to read and understand the recipe. What ingredients do I need, how, and when, to put them together? How long is this going to take?

Then I have to get the ingredients together. Are they in the fridge – what shelf or drawer? Maybe they're in the kitchen pantry or the auxiliary pantry in our garage? And where the heck are the spices?

Should I use a pot (what size) or a frying pan? Maybe a bowl or plate in the microwave? Can I use the toaster oven or do I have to use the real oven (which I have to empty first)?

What plates should I use when serving the meal?

And then the biggest concern – timing. How do I get all the elements of the meal to be ready at the same time?

I really need to concentrate. For me, cooking is an immersive experience.

According to [www.Merriam-Webster.com](http://www.Merriam-Webster.com), an Immersive Experience is “characterized by deep absorption or immersion in something (such as an activity or a real or artificial environment).”

That's why, for me, cooking something new is great for forgetting about my depression for a half hour or more. And, who knows, you might wind up with a delicious meal.

## 6. *Have a Good Cry*

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*"I didn't want my picture taken because I was going to cry. I didn't know why I was going to cry, but I knew that if anybody spoke to me or looked at me too closely the tears would fly out of my eyes and the sobs would fly out of my throat and I'd cry for a week. I could feel the tears brimming and sloshing in me like water in a glass that is unsteady and too full."*

— Sylvia Plath  
American Poet, Novelist, and  
Short-Story Writer



I am a guy. But I admit that I'm a wuss. I cry at weddings, even when I don't know anybody there. I cry watching rom-coms. And, of course, I cry at sad movies. I can't even watch Bambi. When he calls out for his mother, I'm bawling like a baby.

I try to be upbeat (even with my depression) but every once in a while, something will trigger a thought that makes me incredibly sad. Something I did in the past. Or something I didn't do. A memory of someone I loved. A thought about a possible future tragedy.

When that happens, and I'm alone, I actually concentrate on that thought. I make myself think about it even more.

The reason for that, is that I actually want to cry. I want to bring tears to my eyes.

By forcing myself to cry, I am going through a release, a cleansing, a catharsis, what some people call an emotional purging.

With this sudden outpouring of emotions, that have been pent up inside me, I achieve an emotional release.

These emotional tears (which some people say flush stress hormones and other toxins out of our system) are an excellent method to release the negative energy created by strong emotions.

I lay down on the bed or couch, curl into a ball and shed some tears. For me it doesn't last long. I am lucky that I don't naturally sob.

In a few minutes, I stop crying and feel great relief.

## 7. Declutter

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*Having depression is being in an abusive relationship with yourself.*

— Emily Dotterer  
from [imagenestur.com](https://imagenestur.com)

You don't have to be a hoarder to mentally benefit from decluttering. I am not a hoarder, per se, I am more of a "put things in piles" kind of guy. I am also a procrastinator (more on that in Strategy 33), which doesn't help.

And, I am also a little lazy, so (for example) I don't pick up the mail every day. On my desk, I have a pile of mail from two weeks ago, and next to that I have a pile from last week. This week's mail is in a pile on the pass-through between the kitchen and dining room. In a couple of days, I'll be moving that to a new pile on my desk.

A lot of our mail is junk and just needs to be recycled. But some of it is important. Some of it is bills that need to be paid. Some of it needs to be responded to.

I haven't even mentioned all the other piles on my desk, sitting on top of my printer, on shelves, and even in cabinets.

With all the important stuff mixed up with the junk, in the numerous piles, I am always afraid that I will not be able to find

something I need. This causes a constant state of anxiety which, as we already know, can lead to depression.

Then, even though I know I am getting into a danger zone when the piles on my desk start running into each other, I still don't do anything about it. My excuse is that it will take too long and that it is not as important as other things I need to do (like playing games on my computer). But really, I am scared that I will find something that I neglected and will be in some kind of trouble.

But, when the piles do start running into each other, and I feel like I have a little bit of energy, I'll dive into those piles and start sorting. At least for phase one. Depending on the size of the piles there may be several phases to my decluttering (see Strategy 26 – One Bite at a Time). The important thing is that I started.

It never actually takes as long as I imagined and I am extremely relieved when I don't find something important that I forgot about, or I find something just in time to take care of it without penalties. It does take a load off my shoulders.

The best thing about decluttering is that it motivates me to get my ass in gear and attempt to get things in order (see Strategy 27 - Organize).

By the way, a great example of decluttering is in the movie "Limitless" starring Bradley Cooper. When his new drug kicks in, and he returns to his incredibly messy apartment, he cannot believe that he is living that way.

He starts cleaning and putting things away so fast that the movie shows multiples of his character all working at once.

Afterward, he gets back to working on his book and writes like a fiend. I'd like to have that drug.

## 8. *Eat with Others*

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*The walls we build around us to keep sadness out also keeps out the joy.*

— **Jim Rohn**

**American Entrepreneur, Author and  
Motivational Speaker**

You may have heard that, at work, you should never eat alone. Sharing meals with coworkers can be a networking tool and help your career in many ways.

Smart employers may even encourage employees to go to lunch together because they know that it boosts productivity. Studies have shown that this is true in the office as well as the firehouse. When firefighters eat together, they tend to have better job performance than firefighters who dine alone.

But I think you should eat with others because it can make you happier and decrease depression:

- Researchers have found that people who eat socially are more likely to feel better about themselves and have a wider social network than those who don't.

- The more often people eat with others the more likely they are to feel happy and satisfied with their lives.
- Eating with family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers is a great way to have quality time with others.
- At the office, having a friend to eat with can lessen the stress of going to work every day, make us feel connected, and promote bonding.
- Eating together releases positive emotions. Other than exercise and sex, a shared meal is one of the best ways to boost endorphins.

Food is often a major part of celebrations and special events. But making time to enjoy meals with others doesn't just happen. You may have to force yourself to put some effort into scheduling, but it is definitely worth it.

Sadly, seniors often tend to eat alone. This can result in a sense of isolation and feelings of loneliness, especially at mealtimes. The result may be a loss of appetite. Then eating less can affect their intake of important nutrients. By eating with others, they can:

- Spend more time eating and being with others while they enjoy a meal.
- Increase the amount of food they eat, which can help them get more of the important nutrients they need for good health.

And finally, when families regularly eat together their overall mental health is improved, and they have decreased substance abuse, behavioral problems, and eating disorders.

Bon appetit!

## *9. Exercise / Physical Activity*

---

*At times, I feel overwhelmed  
and my depression leads me  
into darkness.*

— Dorothy Hamill  
American Figure Skater

If you are depressed, even a little, the last thing you want to do is exercise. But if you can find the willpower to do just a little bit of physical activity, the benefits will be huge.

This strategy, however, is not just about Exercise, it also includes any kind of Physical Activity. Walking is the easiest, but don't discount house cleaning, yard work, or cleaning out the garage.

Of course, there are more aerobic exercises that are good for your heart such as running, swimming, hiking, or cross-country skiing. And don't forget about dancing. That can really get your heart pumping.

There have been numerous studies indicating that exercise helps to reduce symptoms of depression. So, it is no secret that physical activity, even in small doses, can improve your mood. Medical professionals even have a name for it: "The feel-good effect." Apparently, exercise activates certain "feel-good" endorphins in the brain, which can help ease depression.

The Mayo Clinic says that engaging in at least 30 minutes of exercise on three to five days of the week could significantly help to lessen symptoms of depression.

Besides helping with outright depression, exercise has also been shown to reduce stress and anxiety. If you are a student, you can also benefit from the impact that exercise has on the brain, including improved memory and thinking skills. When this happens, it makes you feel better and that can enhance your sense of well-being.

## *10. Foot Health*

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*Depression is like quicksand,  
the more you try to escape on  
your own, the deeper you sink.  
Use the supports, tools and  
resources thrown at you from  
those on the outside.*

— **Jamie McClintic**  
**Doctor and Author**



This is definitely one of the annoyances (that I mention in the Introduction) that you want to avoid. Especially if you are depressed.

Even little discomforts can curtail your activities, causing you to do less / think more, and become more depressed.

When your feet hurt, you don't want to stand, much less walk or exercise. Foot pain can be a real pain you know where.

Without trying to gross you out, here is a list (in no particular order) of some of the ailments that can affect your feet: Athlete's foot, calluses, bunions, diabetic neuropathy, ingrown toenails, arthritis, broken bones, nail fungus, plantar fasciitis (heel pain), blisters, corns, and heel spurs.

Most of these can be easily treated. Even if you don't have any of these problems, at the moment, I suggest that you find yourself a good Podiatrist and schedule regular visits.

I can speak from experience. I had a problem with my foot that literally took years to resolve. I couldn't walk very far without pain. I stopped exercising. I stopped walking the dogs. I avoided any activities where I would have to walk more than a few steps. I was miserable.

I wound up going to three different podiatrists before I found a good one. Like all doctors, some are better than others.

She gave me the right treatments and the right advice. Within a few short months my foot was healed and I was able to walk without pain.

I still had other problems that made me depressed but, at least, foot pain wasn't one of them.

## *11. Join a Group*

---

*Everyone says I am not alone.  
So why do I feel like I am.*

— **Unknown Author**

If you enjoy something, wouldn't it be fun to be with others who enjoy the same thing.

I've already talked about belonging to a church, but this Strategy has nothing to do with religion.

I admit that I don't know much about Facebook. But apparently you can find groups for almost everything.

You can also use the internet to find groups where people actually get together in the same room.

My advice is to try out different groups. As a writer I attended some writing group meetings. Most of them were not exactly what I was looking for so I went to the trouble of creating my own group. Unfortunately, that didn't work out either. But I kept trying.

If you have a passion for something (a movie series, an activity, collecting something, a particular charity, etc.) there are groups of people out there who enjoy the same thing.

Groups allow you to be in the same room (or maybe a chat room) with others. You might be able to make friends, and you might agree to get together for other activities.

Group activities might include hiking, dancing, trying new restaurants, fixing cars, seeing classic movies, and a million other things.

Anything that you can do that forces you to be with others (that you hopefully like) is a good thing and can distract you from your depression.

## 12. Gut Health

---

*If you don't think your anxiety, depression, sadness and stress impact your physical health, think again. All of these emotions trigger chemical reactions in your body, which can lead to inflammation and a weakened immune system. Learn how to cope, sweet friend. There will always be dark days.*

— Kris Carr

**American Author and Wellness Activist**

Poor gut health is another annoyance to avoid. It can make you physically unhappy and mentally depressed.

Don't let these relatively minor aches and pains color your mood. There are plenty of ways (medically and non-medically) to alleviate occasional symptoms.

Not to really gross you out, but symptoms of poor gut health can be indigestion (upset stomach), gas, bloating, abdominal pain, nausea, constipation, and diarrhea.

Everyone has these maladies every once in a while, and they are annoying. But having any of these constantly is downright depressing.

(If you do have a reoccurring problem, it is time to see a Gastroenterologist. These symptoms might be signs of something more serious.)

For occasional gut health issues, over the counter medications might work. Some people swear by probiotics that might help regulate the flora and fauna in the intestinal tract. You will have to try different methods to see if any of these work for you.

Totally non-medical ways of dealing with occasional stomach issues include eating slowly and chewing your food thoroughly, avoiding carbonated beverages, lowering your stress levels, getting enough sleep, and staying hydrated.

And chocolate – unless you are allergic. Chocolate makes everything better.

### *13. Find a Mental Happy Place*

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*When you feel worried and depressed, consciously form a smile on your face and act upbeat until the happy feeling becomes genuine.*

— Jonathan Lockwood Huie  
Author of Self-Awareness Books

Not everyone can travel to their favorite place in the world whenever they want, but everyone can imagine being there.

For me this is an easy one. My wife and I like to take vacations at one particular place where we book a condo. We love it mostly because it is familiar and we have so many great memories.

The condos there are beautiful, sometimes bigger than where we live now, the grounds are landscaped, the almost private pool is nearby. There is a restaurant that we love and tons of activities nearby.

If you can't physically be in a Real Happy Place (see the next Strategy) then dreaming of being there is a pretty good alternative.

Depression can psychologically take you to dark places. But closing your eyes and visualizing you are someplace where you have happy memories can really lighten your mood. It may be hard to keep those thoughts foremost in your mind, but as long as you can you will feel better.

By the way, another mental happy place for me is San Francisco's Fisherman's Warf. I was there a few years ago before it became way too crowded and touristy. But many years ago, there were several small outdoor stands selling crabs. My traveling buddies and I bought some Dungeness crab, sourdough bread and beers, and sat on a convenient bench facing San Francisco Bay. It was heaven and one of my fondest memories.

## *14. Find a Real Happy Place*

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*Depression is like falling so deep down the rabbit hole you forget what the sky looks like.*

— Robin Brodsky Curtin  
Clinical Social Worker and Therapist



For this Strategy I am not, by any means, suggesting that you actually go on a vacation. What you need is a Strategy that you can accomplish within minutes not days.

For most Strategies in this book, I recommend that you get together with others. But for this one, you might want to do it alone. With no intrusions.

So, what is a Real Happy Place? It is a physical location, that you can get to easily, and by being there attain a sensation of well-being. Maybe some place that has a really beautiful view. Or someplace close by that has a special meaning to you.

For me, a real happy place is one that is mostly private. Where I can spend some alone time and not be disturbed. Yours could be your bedroom, your man cave, the garage, your car, even a bathroom or closet.

Wherever your Real Happy Place is, when you get there, the immediate cares of the world should just wash away. A smile should come to your lips and the wrinkles in your brow should disappear. You should almost be able to feel your blood pressure drop and have a feeling of contentment come over you.

But, (there is always a but) not everyone will be able to do this. Your daily responsibilities may be so time consuming that taking a break would be impossible. You may not be able to be away from others if you are taking care of children or the elderly. Or there may not be a suitable locale available to you.

However, if you can achieve this Strategy, this will be one of the best activities you can do to alleviate your depression, at least for a while.

## *15. Help Someone*

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*Often the people with the  
strongest hearts carry the  
heaviest ones.*

— **Unknown Author**

You can get some of the best feelings in the world when you give of yourself to help another person. (Personally, I get this feeling when I also help an animal – but I will discuss that in Strategy 31.)

If you have an emotional bond to the other person then this feeling is multiplied tenfold.

The word for the observance of concern for the happiness of another human being is “Altruism.” That is acting simply out of a desire to help another person, not because you feel obligated to out of duty.

But does altruism reduce depression? There is an old Chinese expression that says: “If you want to be happy for an hour, take a nap. If you want to be happy for a day, go fishing. If you want to be happy for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want to be happy for a lifetime, help somebody.”

Research shows that, by having altruistic attitudes and engaging in altruistic behaviors, there is a positive impact on physical health and mental well-being. Acts of altruism can also be a great form of stress relief. The act of giving of yourself can activate the area of the brain associated with positive feelings, lifting your spirits and making you feel better.

Using medical technology, we now know that altruism activates the same parts of the brain that are stimulated by food and sex, and it's pleasurable. Helping others may just be the secret to living a happier life.

Helping others can also include giving financial gifts to charities such as those that help the homeless, sick children, disabled veterans, refugees, victims of famine, food banks, research hospitals, or other causes.

However, your gift of time is often more valuable than the gift of money. We don't all have discretionary income, but we all have available time, and can give some of that time to help others.

## *16. Get a Hobby*

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*Depression begins with  
disappointment. When  
disappointment festers in our  
soul, it leads to discouragement.*

— Joyce Meyer  
American Author

A hobby is defined as, “An activity that you do, on a regular basis, for pleasure in your leisure time.” No rush, no pressure.

Hobbies are great for relaxation and can help you reduce stress, anxiety and depression. When you are immersed in your hobby it is very hard to think of anything else, like why you are depressed.

There are many different types of hobbies. They can be broadly grouped into active hobbies, mental hobbies, and creative pursuits.

If I listed all the hobbies I can think of it would fill this book and more. But, in no particular order, some of the more popular hobbies are reading, gardening, cooking, shopping, painting, photography, playing games like chess, scrapbooking, flower arranging, puzzles (see Strategy 36 – Do Puzzles), playing a musical instrument (see Strategy 24 – Listen to Music), collecting stamps, and making models.

Hobbies are mostly done for fun but some hobbies can lead to getting paid: Writing reviews of books; becoming an expert on a specific subject and offering lectures (I hear that cruise lines are always looking for lecturers); getting paid to do calligraphy for fancy invitations; or using your cooking skills to become a caterer.

We all need more fun in our lives. Hobbies can supply a great deal.

## *17. Intoxicants*

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*Sometimes I just think  
depression's one way of coping  
with the world. Like, some  
people get drunk, some people do  
drugs, some people get  
depressed. Because there's so  
much stuff out there that you  
have to do something to deal  
with it.*

— Ned Vizzini  
Author

As I have said, I am not a medical professional and I therefore do not recommend any prescription drugs. Neither do I recommend taking large amounts of over-the-counter medications, or any other drugs that may be legal in your community.

But what this Strategy is suggesting, is that you might want to use a legal drug to take the edge off your depression. The emphasis here is “legal.”

Obviously, alcohol, of some form or another, might be the Strategy that works for you. Depending on where you live, there may be other intoxicants that will also work.

But let me give you two words of caution:

1. Do not overdo it.
2. No matter how little you take, do not drive a vehicle, operate any machinery, or make any important decisions while under the influence of any drug.

(I almost didn’t include this Strategy because the sub-title of this book is “50 Non-Medical Strategies for Coping with Depression.” But this may work for you.)

Intoxicants are NOT a permanent cure for depression. They are not even a solution, but just a temporary diversion with possible unforeseen consequences.

Be very careful and take this Strategy with a very large grain of salt.

## 18. *Laugh More*

---

*I think the saddest people  
always try their hardest to  
make people happy because they  
know what it's like to feel  
absolutely worthless, and they  
don't want anyone else to feel  
like that.*

— Robin Williams

**American Actor and Comedian**

(By far, this is my favorite strategy so I decided to devote more space to this one and to include some more quotes.)

I swear this really happened to me. It was the weekend. Nothing particular on my schedule (or so I thought). I was a little tired, a little down, so I decided to waste some time on the computer. I looked at my usual news website then started looking at YouTube.com.



*Good humor is a tonic for mind and body. It is the best antidote for anxiety and depression. It is a business asset. It attracts and keeps friends. It lightens human burdens. It is the direct route to serenity and contentment.*

**Grenville Kleiser**

**Author of Inspirational Books**

I found a clip of a stand-up comic. He was pretty funny. Then I looked at another clip of him performing, then one of him on a talk show.

I think I was on the fifth clip when all of a sudden it hit me: Hey, I got stuff to do. I have a whole list of to-dos. I'm even in the middle of writing this book (yes, this one).

## *18. Laugh More (continued)*

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All of a sudden, just by laughing and getting into a good mood, I was able to focus. It snapped me out of the down mood I was in and actually energized me to start doing stuff.

*There isn't anybody out there who doesn't have a mental health issue, whether it's depression, anxiety, or how to cope with relationships. Having OCD is not an embarrassment anymore - for me. Just know that there is help and your life could be better if you go out and seek the help.*

**Howie Mandel**

**Canadian Comedian, TV Personality,  
and Game Show Host**

Laughter is the best medicine. It is really hard to feel bad when you are laughing. And, for most of us, hearing the sound of other people laughing makes you feel good. That is why they used to have laugh tracks on old TV shows and now perform in front of a live audience.

*People love to make comedians out to be miserable, dark, twisted people. And I just - I think a lot of people struggle with depression and mental illness and have issues and problems within their family. The mailman has it. Your neighbor has it. It's just that comedians have a microphone.*

**Tig Notaro**

**American Stand-Up Comic**

If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Or you can text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hr support from the Crisis Text Line. (After July 2022 reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 988) 61

## ***18. Laugh More (continued)***

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I know that very few people have my particular sense of humor – it is pretty weird and can be very dark – but most people appreciate some form of comedy. Being a writer, I personally like wordplay, but my sense of what is funny is pretty broad. I can usually find humor in almost any situation, even when I shouldn't.

*A new study found that people who are depressed have a greater risk of stroke. Well, that should cheer them up.*

**Jay Leno**

**American Comedian and Former  
Late-Night Television Host**

Laughter can also be a good workout. Have you ever laughed so hard you couldn't catch your breath? Your body is reacting, physically, to your laughter. You are actually getting a little bit of exercise. Laughter can relieve physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes. Believe it

or not, laughter can boost the immune system, decreases stress hormones, and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.

And one more thing: Laughter is a great way to defuse a tense situation. It is very hard to be angry when you are laughing. Whenever my wife is mad at me, I try to make her laugh. It really cuts through the tension.

## *19. Learn Something / Take a Class*

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*High school was difficult for me because I was in the thick of dealing with my depression and anxiety.*

— Lili Reinhart  
American Actress

For the last few days, I was absolutely catatonic. I couldn't concentrate on anything and was doing a lot of "wasting time."

I forced myself to get on the computer to check for emails, managed to somehow get on the Internet and decided to browse YouTube.com.

Instead of just scrolling through their suggestions, like I usually do, I searched for "How to write better." That was a pretty generic topic so it did provide me with lots of choices.

I chose one that sounded interesting, and wasn't too long, and within a minute or two I was actually learning some interesting techniques for how to write better.

When that was finished, I looked at some other short videos and continued to learn. This was starting to be fun. Was I still depressed? What depression?

All of a sudden, I wanted to get back to writing this book. I realized that when you learn new things, your brain starts working again, you have energy and drive, and possibilities start presenting themselves.

I have to admit that I am sometimes scared to learn new things. I think it will take too long or I won't be able to "get it," especially for technical topics.

But it turns out that I am smarter than I usually think I am, and I can learn that new stuff. What a sense of accomplishment! And now I can use those skills to do other things. I also might be able to use those new skills at work or for my hobby (see Strategy 16 – Get a Hobby).

Most of all I learned that you can't use your brain to learn and be depressed at the same time.

## *20. Write a Letter to the Editor*

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*If you look at suicides, most of them are connected to depression. And the mental health system just fails them. It's so sad. We know what to do. We just don't do it.*

— Rosalynn Carter  
Former First Lady of the United States

They say that everyone has an opinion. I hope that you are not too depressed to care about some issues.

Personally, I care about a lot of issues. So, when I read (or see) something that contradicts what I believe, or I know is downright false, it infuriates me to the point where I can't think of anything else. I become obsessed.



And the fact that everyone doesn't see things the way I do drives me crazy and makes me depressed.

I have to admit that I watch way too much news (see Strategy 25 – Stop Watching the News) and I still read newspapers every day. I read the editorials, and opinion pieces, and the Letters to the Editor that other readers have written. Occasionally I agree with them but much of the time I do not.

It really annoys me when I read about some issue and the viewpoint is totally wrong (in my opinion). I feel compelled to correct that information or that person's ideas.

Writing a Letter to the Editor helps me get those feelings out of my system. I can release that pent up fury and get back to normal (whatever that is).

And, in a day or two, if my letter gets published, I feel great. I definitely feel a rush and have a sense of accomplishment. There are only a limited number of letters that any publication can print – they just don't have the space. So, I consider it an honor to have my letter selected for others to read.

But actually, I've have also written Letters to the Editor that I never even sent. Sometimes I realize that my rebuttal would be one of many and the chance of my letter being published would be very low. However, because I got it out of my system, I still feel better.

By the way, I am not talking about posting a comment to a computer blog. There are usually too many of those for my opinion to stand out. Definitely not as satisfying.

## *21. Lists, Calendars and Routines*

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*Every time you feel depressed about something, try to identify a corresponding negative thought you had just prior to and during the depression. Because these thoughts have actually created your bad mood, by learning to restructure them, you can change your mood.*

— David D. Burns

**American Psychiatrist, Author and Educator**

This Strategy is all about anxiety. Depression is bad enough. But, throw in the anxiety you feel when you are sure you forgot to do something but can't remember what it is – that just exacerbates the situation.

When you are depressed, your mind becomes cloudy. It is hard to remember things and you are easily distracted.

Out of the blue, you suddenly remember that you have to do something. You walk into another room, then stop. Why are you there? What were you going to do? You really try to remember. But, without having it written down, you can't.

Granted, the situation I just described can happen to anyone. But writing down what you have to (or plan to) do can eliminate that constant anxious feeling. Making a list, writing appointments or deadlines on a calendar, and having a routine allows you to turn off your mind and eliminate those anxieties.

Personally, my life is way too busy. Too many tasks to take care of that need to be done by a certain time. When I remember that I need to do something, I add it to my list. That alleviates some of my anxiety. But I still have to remember to constantly refer to my list and actually do the important, or urgent, tasks. That's another problem with depression (see Strategy 33 – Don't Procrastinate).

I have to admit that unfortunately, I am at the stage of my life where I have to take a fair number of drugs. This is one place I really need a list and routine. I need to remember to take one drug before breakfast, some pills after dinner, and another before bedtime. Boy is it ever easy to forget or make mistakes. Even though I try to keep to a routine, it is easy to get distracted and forget. I've missed more than a few doses of my medication.

Having a routine allows me to do things by rote without having to think about them: Feed the dogs, prepare dinner, eat while watching my favorite TV show, then take my pills. Don't forget to feed the dogs!

## *22. Get a Massage*

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*I think most human beings go through some sort of depression in their life. And if they don't, I think that's weird.*

— Kirsten Dunst  
American Actress and Model

When you are physically relaxed, mental relaxation comes with it. Depression and anxiety can really stress you out (to use the vernacular). This tension may affect you physically, causing all kinds of ailments. A massage is one way to eliminate that tension.

Massage therapy was first practiced in India, China, and Greece starting around 3000 BCE. It was used as a system of natural healing, to relieve pain, and prevent and cure illnesses. Hippocrates, the “Father of Medicine,” told his followers about the value of massage as a part of healing and a healthy lifestyle.

So, what can a massage do for someone suffering from depression? It can lower your stress level, boost your mental health, and improve your general wellness. It can help you manage pain (see Strategy 28 – Pain Management), increase range of motion, increase blood flow to the tissues, increase your immune function, and even improve physical fitness.

During a full body massage, you are mostly naked so it is important that you are okay with that. You should also be comfortable with who is giving you the massage. I am not homophobic but I definitely prefer to have my massage given by a woman. If a full body massage is not for you, then a chair massage (where you remain clothed), might be a good alternative.

You should also be comfortable with the type of the massage. Some massage therapists have a light touch and some (even women) do a deep tissue massage that can actually hurt. Personally, I like that “good” pain but it may be too intense for you. Don’t be shy about telling your massage therapist what you like and don’t like.

## *23. Move On – Stop Dwelling in the Past*

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*Do not brood over your past mistakes and failures as this will only fill your mind with grief, regret and depression. Do not repeat them in the future.*

— Swami Sivananda  
Hindu Spiritual Teacher

Have you ever had something happen to you that you just can't get over? No matter what you do it gnaws at you, morning, noon and night. It drives you crazy. It might even make you catatonic with depression.

Well, get over it!

I hope it is obvious that I am being facetious. It is not so easy to forget about a mistake you made, something said to you that was hurtful, the loss of a loved one, a set of circumstances that didn't turn out well, or some other serious situation.

But you do need to move on so that you can re-start living your life. The moving on process may take some time, depending on how much the incident has affected you. And it will take discipline on your part, but it must be done.

Some may say that you should seek closure or forgive yourself, but that would mean you have to revisit the incident, which is something you do not want to do.

To truly move on there are several techniques you can use:

- Start by silencing your inner critic – bad things happen to everyone, you are no different
- Try to forget about the past – look forward to the future
- Find a distraction so you don't dwell on the incident
- Keep yourself busy with other things – work, hobbies, etc.
- Do the things you love – choose several of the Strategies in this book
- Try new things and try to meet new people
- Establish new routines
- And finally, pamper yourself – be good to yourself, you deserve it

This is a difficult Strategy to execute, but I know you can do it.

## *24. Listen to Music*

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*I suffer from deep depression,  
so my only release is music.*

— **Kevin Gates**  
**American Rapper, Singer, and**  
**Entrepreneur**

Music really does have charms that soothe the savage breast.

This famous quote from William Congreve (1670-1729) apparently has a lot more truth to it than even he realized. The complete quotation is: "Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast. To soften rocks, or bend the knotted oak."



Which basically means that the rhythms and sounds in music can calm those with a violent, aggressive, or depressed nature.

You may have heard anecdotes about teenagers, suffering from their first broken relationships, listening to their favorite songs over and over. Why? Because it soothes their troubled souls. Music speaks to them.

So, music can reduce symptoms of depression and have an impact on a person's mood. But the type of music is important. Generally, classical music and music for meditation provide the best mood enhancing benefits. Heavy metal and techno music are mostly ineffective and may even be detrimental – but you never know (different strokes for different folks).

Of course, listening to music can also be entertaining, and some research suggests that it might even improve your health. And there may be other psychological benefits as well. Music can relax the mind, energize the body, and even help you manage your pains.

Personally, when I visit the dentist (which I hate doing), I use music. I bring my headphones and my old MP3 player filled with my favorite Classic Rock songs. The music has a good beat (and you can dance to it – that's an inside joke, if you don't get it then ask your parents).

The important thing is that the familiar music calms me enough so I can sit quietly so my dentist can do what he has to do. It soothes my savage breast.

## *25. Stop Watching the News*

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*It is very hard to explain to people who have never known serious depression or anxiety the sheer continuous intensity of it. There is no off switch.*

— Matt Haig  
English Novelist and Journalist

I'm a bit of a political junkie. I watch the news religiously. But there is story after story about the pandemic, there are daily segments on mass shootings, the fluctuating stock market and the economy. And, I won't get into my politics but, let's just say that there have been some disappointments lately.

No wonder I sometimes feel hopeless and that the world is heading for disaster. All this news is depressing me.

How about you? Are you purposefully watching/reading too much bad news? There's actually a new word for that: "Doomscrolling."

The term doomscrolling could be used to refer to watching too much TV/Cable news, but it was coined implying too much scrolling through news and social media websites (on PCs and smart phones).

You are doomscrolling (also called doomsurfing) when you continue to surf or scroll through bad news even though that news makes you sad, gloomy, or depressed.

What are the effects of doomscrolling? It can cause feelings of stress, anxiety, panic and depression. It may even lead to insomnia and self-harm.

Why do we doomscroll? Our brains are always on the lookout for threats to our safety. Doomscrolling (which itemizes all the bad things that are and can happen) prepares us for what may come.

How to avoid doomscrolling?

- Set aside a sensible block of time during the day to spend scrolling through the news
- Have a cut-off time at least an hour before bed
- Leave all screens (TVs, PCs, tablets and phones) out of your bedroom to create a no news safe zone

It's okay to keep informed, but just don't overdo it.

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*26. One Bite at a Time – Even if  
you can't finish, at least you can  
start*

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*Some days, 24 hours is too  
much to stay put in, so I take  
the day hour by hour, moment by  
moment. I break the task, the  
challenge, the fear into small,  
bite-size pieces. I can handle a  
piece of fear, depression, anger,  
pain, sadness, loneliness, illness.  
I actually put my hands up to  
my face, one next to each eye,  
like blinders on a horse.*

— Regina Brett  
American Author

Writing this book is a perfect example of this particular Strategy. If I thought of the entire process as one task, it would be overwhelming. I would be completely intimidated, would freeze up and feel incapable of even taking the first step. But, by breaking it down to one Strategy (one page) at a time, I am able to make progress on this huge project.

In my career I've sometimes been a project manager. I've taken on monumental assignments and broken them down to individual tasks that can each be easily accomplished. As a project manager I usually have a staff to whom I can assign those tasks and then step back and make sure they are done.

For your own, individual, projects, you probably won't have that luxury. But you can still break down that huge task into workable bits.

Desmond Tutu (Archbishop of Cape Town from 1986 to 1996) has been quoted as saying, "There is only one way to eat an elephant: A bite at a time." What this means is that some problems (or tasks) just seem too big to deal with. But if you take on just a little at a time you can, eventually, achieve anything.

In Strategy 34 (Tackle That Big Project), I talk about starting something formidable. The first step is always the hardest. But you only have to worry about one task. Then you can step back and think about what to do next. Do another task, step back, and repeat.

Don't let depression stop you from successfully completing that big project.

## 27. Organize

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*Depression is feeling like you've lost something but having no clue when or where you last had it. Then one day you realize what you lost is yourself.*

— Unknown Author

My desk is a mess. I needed to find some important information buried in my piles (see Strategy 7 – Declutter) and I couldn't. My anxiety level was through the roof.

I really have been meaning to clean up my desk, but I haven't (see Strategy 33 – Don't Procrastinate). And now the chickens have come home to roost, which means, "The consequences of not doing something always catch up with you."

In my own defense, I've been really anxious the last few weeks. I do a lot of work sitting at my desk in front of my computer. But when I look to the side I see mounds of paper, envelopes, unopened mail, lists with unfinished tasks, information to be filed.

I am anxious because I have no idea what is in those piles. Are there important letters, information, bills to be paid? And, how long would it take? What if I only was able to do a little bit and the rest was still there?

I keep saying to myself that I'll get to it later today or tomorrow. But I keep avoiding it because I'm scared of what I will find in that mound. Later never happens and tomorrow is just a dream.

But, miracle of miracle, tomorrow finally came. I couldn't think of anything else to do that was more important or urgent. I finally tackled those piles.

It only took an hour. But finally, my desk is clear (well, almost). Everything that should have been put away is filed.

I felt really relieved. I fought against my anxiety and accomplished something today. I think I deserve a reward of a comfort food snack. Where is that chocolate?

## *28. Pain Management*

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*Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say "My tooth is aching" than to say "My heart is broken."*

— C.S. Lewis  
British Writer Including  
“The Problem of Pain”



In this Strategy I am not talking about real physical pain. If you are suffering from that you should definitely see a doctor.

What I am talking about is the annoying little pains that keep you up at night, prevent you from concentrating, or make you ache and moan. If you are depressed, those annoying little pains can seem like really big aggravations and make everything worse.

Now, I am not a doctor or a medical professional of any kind, so I would never be so bold as to recommend any medication.

But I can tell you what I would do.

If I have a headache, I would take some over the counter pain killer. My choice is aspirin but there is also acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

For an upset stomach I would take an antacid or gas pill.

For diarrhea one of those pink liquids.

A non-medicinal method to deal with pain is a massage (see Strategy 22 – Get a Massage). It can help you cope with the pain, increase range of motion, increase blood flow to the tissues, increase your immune function, and improve physical fitness. It can even lower your stress level, boost your mental health, and improve your general wellness. And, it feels really good.

The important thing is to alleviate the little pains. The last thing you need when you are depressed is additional irritations.

## *29. Plan a Party*

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*Sometimes It's easier to  
pretend that you don't care, than  
to admit it's killing you.*

— Anonymous

If you don't have a lot of experience in event planning, you may find this Strategy more anxiety producing than alleviating. But, if you like parties, and dealing with the details, then this can be a wonderful distraction from your depression or mundane problems.

When you are planning a party there are so many details to deal with that it is almost impossible to think of anything else.

As a party planner you need to set a date, get a location, choose the theme and decorations, invite guests, choose the food to be served (maybe prepare the food as well), decide on entertainment and/or games, and select what drinks will be available.

If you are looking forward to actually being at the party, and to being with the people who will be attending the event, then planning the party can be a very pleasant diversion from your everyday activities.

If you like parties, in general, but don't want to put in the effort of really working out all the details, then you might want to plan a "fantasy party." It's a lot less work but still allows you to occupy your mind with non-depressing thoughts. What would you consider to be the perfect party? Where would it be and who would you invite?

(For another way to divert your mind see Strategy 49 – Plan a Dream Vacation.)

## *30. Pay Bills / Money*

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*It's a bit like walking down a long, dark corridor never knowing when the light will go on.*

— Neil Lennon

**Football Coach and Former Player from  
Northern Ireland**

I don't know which is worse: Being generally depressed; or being depressed because you can't pay your bills. Owing money really sucks!

For many of you, not having money is a major cause of your depression. If you don't have money, and you have bills to pay, that's more than enough to make you depressed all on its own.

Unfortunately, I cannot advise you on ways to acquire more money, but there are three Strategies I can give you.

The first is to screw up your courage and talk to your creditors. You may be anxious and afraid of what their reaction will be but you'd be surprised just how much they actually want to help you. They might allow you to skip a monthly payment or be willing to work out a payment schedule.

The second is to try to borrow money. If financial institutions cannot help then ask relatives or friends. Be honest, and propose a schedule where you can pay them back. Something like, "I can start to pay you back in two months, ten percent each month. I am even willing to pay you interest." If they agree then you may have some money available to you and it will be a genuine relief.

The third is a very short-term Strategy but may be worth a try. Choose one of your bills and pay that one. It certainly won't solve all your financial problems but you would be surprised how that little success will make you feel better. If you can pay your bills (even one of them), it is such a relief. That one burden is off your shoulders.

As a side note, I know that when I am depressed, I tend to procrastinate (see Strategy 33 – Don't Procrastinate) and I let piles of unopened mail accumulate on my desk (see Strategy 27 - Organize). In those piles of envelopes will probably be some bills that I have forgotten about. Just that thought alone can raise my anxiety level.

Force yourself to go through any unopened mail, take out the bills, put them in some sort of order (by due date), and put them where you can see them and you will be reminded. Yes, that is depressing but it will alleviate the anxiety of not knowing what needs to be paid.

## *31. Pets*

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*Depression is a prison where  
you are both the suffering  
prisoner and the cruel jailer.*

— **Dorothy Rowe**  
**Australian Psychologist and Author**

Have you ever wondered why you feel better, and less depressed, when your pet is around?

It's true, by the way. Spending time with your pet (dog, cat or another animal), can have a positive impact on your mood and your health. Pets can be calming stress-fighters.

88      If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Or you can text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hr support from the Crisis Text Line. (After July 2022 reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 988)

Petting your cat or dog feels good to both you and them. It can lower your blood pressure, help your body release a relaxation hormone, and cuts down on levels of a different stress hormone.

If you have a dog, you might be less likely to get heart disease. Why? Dog owners walk more and have lower blood pressure than people who don't have dogs. And studies show that, after a heart attack, those who own dogs live longer than those who don't have pets.

Even fish, or small non-mammals, can have a calming effect. Some people enjoy watching them swimming around their tank or scurrying within their enclosure.

Generally, people with pets are happier, more trusting, and less lonely than those who don't have pets. They also visit the doctor less often for minor problems.

Your pet, especially dogs, can help you connect with other people. Since retiring, I have had more contact with people at the dog park than anywhere else. Being with others (see Strategy 11 – Join a Group) can definitely help depression.

In Strategy 15 (Help Someone) I talk about the benefit of helping other people. But helping animals is another way of getting that feel-good feeling.

Some people make it their mission to take in rescue animals or even provide foster care for animals. Personally, I can't imagine fostering an animal and then giving it up. I'm sure I would develop a bond and want to keep it as my own pet.

## *32. Photographs*

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*Depression, for me, has been a couple of different things – but the first time I felt it, I felt helpless, hopeless, and things I had never felt before. I lost myself and my will to live.*

— Ginger Zee

**American Television Personality**



Photographs are a great way to preserve your memories. Some memories are melancholy (thoughts of loved ones who have passed away) but most of the memories that you preserve, with photographs, are of happy times.

Nowadays, people tend to take pictures of almost anything (including themselves). But, in the past, photographs were reserved for momentous occasions (parties, graduations, trips, family get togethers, important people in our lives, places we've been, and things we have done).

Photographs can connect you to your past, and remind you of people, places, feelings, and stories. Viewing your photographs can be a very pleasant diversion from your depression.

In the “old days,” when you used a film camera to take a picture, you had to carefully remove the film from the camera, take the film to be developed, and pick up the photos before you could see them. Some photos were worth keeping. You would put them in a photo album. Then that album would sit on a shelf or in a cabinet.

Not too long ago everything switched to digital on your telephone. But if you wanted to see larger versions of your photos, you had to transfer your photo files to your computer. There they sit in some obscure folder, buried deep in your hard drive, mixed in with hundreds (maybe thousands) of other photos.

My suggestion is to find those photos, get rid of the ones that aren't important to you, then organize them. Every once in a while, when you are feeling down, take a look at those photos and re-live some pleasant memories.

### *33. Don't Procrastinate*

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*Depression feels like apathy  
and shame are your new best  
friends.*

— Julie Riley

Boy, talk about being hoist on your own petard. I really wanted to publish this book last year but I couldn't because it wasn't finished. Duh! Why wasn't it finished? Because I procrastinated.

But what does procrastination have to do with depression? Well, your procrastination might be the cause of your depression, and your depression might be the cause of your procrastination. Keep on reading.

Why am I hoist on my own petard? Because procrastination has consequences.

Let me give you an example. This book has been delayed weeks, months (years?). However, right now, I am really motivated to finish the remaining Strategies. I would prefer to work on my computer but I am forced to write this on a pad in longhand. Why? Because my computer broke down and is in the repair shop waiting for an almost inconsequential part. If I didn't procrastinate, I would be able to use my computer.

Because I am always a little depressed, I don't feel like doing too much. Sometimes I'll avoid doing anything important or urgent. Other times I'll start something and lose interest or become distracted. Because I haven't done the important

stuff, I feel bad about my procrastination which deepens my depression. It's a vicious cycle.

So, my first piece of advice is, "Don't procrastinate." Easier said than done.

My second piece of advice is to try to figure out why you procrastinate. For me it has a lot to do with anxiety, especially when I have to do something new. I am scared that I won't be able to figure it out and do what I have to do.

By now, if you are not sure what procrastination is all about, here are some other examples.

Scenario Number 1: There's plenty of time before my project deadline. I'll have plenty of time to do it later. I'll do it after work is over on Friday. There are too many fun things to do Friday night, I'll do what I have to do on the weekend. I think I'll sleep in on Saturday, I can do it on Sunday. Sunday morning the wife gives me her honey-do list, I can still work tonight on my project. Midnight Sunday – even though I am not finished, I have to stop work and get some sleep. Repeat next weekend!

Scenario Number 2: I have to take care of that fix up project. I've never done this before. Do I know how? Do I have the right tools? Do I have the parts? But I don't have to do it today, as long as it gets done by next week, I'll be good. This week is really busy, I'll get to that project in another week. Everything's a priority, except for my project, it will have to wait till the following week. Next month, wasn't there something I needed to do? Oh, it's not too important, it can wait. I've waited this long; it can wait a little longer.

Procrastination: The art of unnecessarily avoiding doing what needs to be done.

## *34. Tackle That Big Project*

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*Keep yourself busy if you want  
to avoid depression. For me,  
inactivity is the enemy.*

— Matt Lucas

**English Actor, Comedian, Writer and  
Television Presenter**

Okay, now that I've talked about all the ways I procrastinate (see Strategy 33 – Don't Procrastinate) it is time for you to stop wasting time and Tackle That Big Project.

This Strategy is about starting that huge, daunting, intimidating, project. Where should you begin? How do you get over the anxiety (and the subsequent depression) of facing that undertaking?

In Strategy 26 (One Bite at a Time), I talked about taking it one step at a time. The first step is always the hardest. Remember the quote by Desmond Tutu (Archbishop of Cape Town from 1986 to 1996), “There is only one way to eat an elephant: A bite at a time.”

Every big project is made up of a bunch of little tasks. You start by deciding what you should do first, then what to do next. You make a plan.

But no plan is set in stone. It can (and usually does) change. In project management we start with a baseline plan but, as the project progresses, we keep track of any departures from that plan.

However, some projects don't need a formal plan. Sometimes you can jump right in with both feet without over analyzing the situation.

Let me tell you about how I wrote my first novel. I had an idea, but it was only the bare bones of a story. Being the novice that I was, I didn't flesh it out and create an outline (plan) for the entire book. I jumped right in and wrote what I thought would be the first chapter. Later, when I started editing, I realized there had to be a new chapter before the first one. Later still, I realized there needed to be another chapter before that one.

If you've ever wanted to accomplish something major, you know that getting started can be a bit of a challenge. Maybe you have some vague idea about what you want but no clue how to get it. Or perhaps you sit down to think about everything you have to do and get completely intimidated, freezing up and feeling incapable of taking the first step.

You are not alone in being anxious about tackling that big project. This is a very common experience, and it's the reason so many people fall short of turning their dreams into reality. They try to eat the whole elephant in a single bite.

Just start. You can always make changes later.

## *35. Finish a Project*

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*Depression is the inability to  
construct a future.*

**– Rollo May**  
**American Existential Psychologist and**  
**Author**

Now that you started your project (see Strategy 34 – Tackle That Big Project), if you don't procrastinate (see Strategy 33 – Don't Procrastinate), you should eventually finish that project. Won't that feel good? Won't that be a relief?

Unfortunately, some of you will procrastinate and leave your project unfinished. That will be as depressing as an albatross around your neck. You will have to continuously dwell on that unfinished project.

But, when you do finish, that weight will be lifted from your shoulders and you will be walking on air. Go ahead, reward yourself. You deserve it.

So, hunker down and do what you have to in order to get it finished. Don't be a perfectionist. In fact, feel free to do the bare minimum. Your goal is to get that project off your plate.

## *36. Solve Puzzles*

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*A human being can survive  
almost anything as long as she  
sees the end in sight. But  
depression is so insidious, and  
it compounds daily, that it's  
impossible to ever see the end.*

— Elizabeth Wurtzel

American Writer, Journalist, and  
Lawyer



For me, puzzles do three things:

- You can only think of one thing at a time. When I do a puzzle, before I go to sleep, that's all I can think about. All my troubles, cares, minor annoyances go away.
- Puzzles can keep you sharp. I know that the puzzles, that I like, keep me on my toes. Recently I started realizing that my vocabulary (my verbal skills) were declining. I started doing some easy crossword puzzles and I am pretty sure my verbal skills are improving.
- Puzzles can set my mood. I'll turn on my computer in the morning (I seem to do everything on my computer) and the first thing I'll do is play my favorite solitaire game. If I win then I feel great and I know I'll have a good day (there is absolutely no scientific evidence for this). Of course, the game is set to only a medium level so my chances of winning are vastly improved.

Another benefit of puzzles is that they can be a gauge of how you feel and what mental shape you are in. When I do a puzzle, I need a clear head to think. If I get stuck and can't finish the puzzle then I know that my cognitive abilities are not at their peak and it's time to go to sleep.

When I pick up that puzzle again (the one that had me stuck), and suddenly I'm no longer at an impasse, then I know my thinking is clearer and it may be because I'm feeling better. I take that as a sign that I should be doing something from one of my to-do lists (see Strategy 21 – Lists, Calendars and Routines).

There are all kinds of puzzles to choose from. Select one type that you enjoy and is not too difficult. After all, you want to be able to win.

## *37. Read Fun Stuff*

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*I really want to be happy, but  
there's something inside me that  
screams "You don't deserve it".*

— **Unknown**

Personally, I'm mostly a non-fiction reader.

However, when I do read a well written novel, I find that I can get so engrossed in the story that I forget about my problems. My stress and tension levels are reduced and it helps me to forget about my depression and anxieties.

You probably enjoy different books than I do. I will read the occasional novel but mostly books about trivia, history, politics or humor (see Strategy 18 – Laugh More). These are what I consider fun. I also do puzzles (see Strategy 36 – Do Puzzles), which have the same effect.

If you read fiction, it allows you to use your imagination and emotionally connect with characters in the story. It even expands your creativity, and strengthens your writing skills.

Reading a page-turner can really be fun. What's on the next page? How will the end turn out? Will one character triumph over another? When you have to stop reading you start anticipating when you will be able to pick up the book again.

Reading stuff you consider fun, not only can be beneficial to your mental health it can also positively affect you physically by lowering your heart rate, relaxing your body and easing muscle tension.

If you read books with sophisticated language, you can increase your vocabulary and stimulate unused portions of your brain, helping to reduce anxiety, depression and even chronic pain.

And you know what else? Reading can be fun. I need to read more.

## *38. Read Short Stories*

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*People think depression is sadness. That it's crying and dressing in black, but people are wrong. Depression is the constant feeling of being numb. It's being numb to emotions, being numb to life. You wake up in the morning just to go back to bed again.*

— Unknown Author

Have you ever started reading that huge novel, barely finished chapter 1, then stopped reading? And you haven't had the desire to pick it up again?

It happens all the time, especially when you are depressed. It is hard to concentrate and easy to lose interest.

Reading a short story, in one sitting, may be an answer.

A short story has all the benefits of a novel (see Strategy 37 – Read Fun Stuff) but takes a lot less time.

- Helps you forget about your depression and anxieties
- Stress and tension levels are reduced
- Expands your imagination
- Emotionally connects you with characters in the story
- Boosts your creativity
- Strengthens your writing skills
- Positively affects you physically (lower heart rate, body relaxation, and easing muscle tension)

It is much easier to focus during a reading session of half-an-hour than in the total time it takes to read a full-size novel. You can still get the pleasure of reading with a lot less effort.

## *39. Sad Thoughts*

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*People who have never dealt with depression think it's just being sad or being in a bad mood. That's not what depression is for me; it's falling into a state of grayness and numbness.*

**— Dan Reynolds  
American Singer**

Some memories are good, some are bad. Sometimes you remember the best, but sometimes you remember the worst.

When you can't shake those bad memories, or "bad" thoughts, how do you get over them?

First, I don't call them "bad" thoughts. I call them sad thoughts. They're not evil or destructive. These thoughts just make you feel sad and depressed. How do you deal with them?

Secondly, don't even try to put them out of your mind. They will continue to come back again and again. There is nothing you can do about that.

So, thirdly, I suggest doing the opposite. Concentrate on those sad thoughts. Bring them front and center and face them.

No one likes feeling sad, but it's better to be sad for a short period of time than to have those feelings nagging at you for hours, days, or even more.

I have found that when you face these difficult thoughts head on, they will dissipate quicker than if you try to avoid them.

However, if those feelings are sad enough, and last long enough, you might even get to Strategy 6 (Have a Good Cry).

## 40. Sex

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*There are wounds that never  
show on the body that are deeper  
and more hurtful than anything  
that bleeds.*

— Laurell K. Hamilton

**American Fantasy and Romance Writer**

Okay, this Strategy is going to be a bit controversial.

Let's assume you are depressed. There is a good chance that you have a loss of desire, have trouble getting to an orgasm, and generally find sex less enjoyable than it used to be.

But (and this is an important “but”), if you still have even a small amount of desire for sex, you should definitely go ahead and do it.

Going a long time without sex can have negative health effects like increased anxiety, depression, and trouble sleeping. Lack of physical intimacy can also lead to a condition known as “touch starvation.” This can contribute to loneliness, isolation, and other symptoms of depression.

So, sex is good for your mental health and can help you to relax. It is certainly a diversion from your everyday activities and it definitely takes your mind off your worries and anxieties.



There are physical benefits too. Having sex causes your body to release endorphins, oxytocin, and dopamine. These are feel-good hormones that help you to fight off anxiety and depression.

And, let's face it, sex is fun.

Having sex with a partner has emotional benefits and usually increases the feeling of intimacy between the two of you. I say, "Do what's enjoyable, as long as it's mutual and consensual."

If you can, let your fantasies run wild. Try things you haven't tried before. Mix it up. Take chances. It is good for your mental health.

Not having a partner available, however, should not stop you from having sex. Whether you are a man or a woman, self-gratification is always an option.

In that case, I suggest you exercise your inner fantasies. What would you like to see or do if you had the chance?

If you find it hard to think of something that excites you, you can always use pornography to do the job. There's a variety of porn out there, including some made by women for women. But word of warning, using too much porn can dull your erotic imagination.

And there are also toys that can be used with a partner or without. They can definitely make it easier to achieve pleasure.

The benefits of sex are both mental (decreased depression, reduced stress, improved self-esteem) and physical (pain relief, increased heart health, a boost to your immune system). Go have fun!

## *41. Shave and a Haircut*

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*Noble deeds and hot baths are  
the best cures for depression.*

— **Dodie Smith**  
**English Novelist and Playwright**

In this Strategy, I am using the phrase “shave and a haircut” as a kind of metaphor referring to keeping yourself clean, neat and groomed.

When you are depressed, you may be neglecting your basic personal hygiene and not even be aware that this is happening. There is definitely a relationship between your mental health and your physical appearance. And vice-versa.

Generally, when you look good, you’re inclined to feel better (see Strategy 3 – Make Yourself Beautiful). And practicing good personal hygiene helps you to look your best.

You may not notice it in yourself but if you were to encounter someone who is not taking care of themselves (unshaven, uncombed hair, dirty fingernails, unwashed clothing, body odor, bad breath, missing teeth), your impression of them would not be good.

When you are depressed, your self-image is not in good shape. And, when your self-image is low, you tend not to take care of yourself.

Unfortunately, the media doesn’t help us with this. We are all bombarded with reminders that our bodies are not perfect. All types of advertisements subconsciously challenge us to compare ourselves to beautiful models. And, if we are not “beautiful,” then they can sell us a product that will make us so.

So, remember to shave, get your hair cut, bathe regularly, trim your nails, brush and floss your teeth, and wash your hands often. You’ll look better and feel better.

## *42. Go Shopping*

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*When women are depressed,  
they eat or go shopping. Men  
invade another country. It's a  
whole different way of thinking.*

— Elayne Boosler  
American Comedian

Some people love to shop. I am not talking about shopping on the internet. I am talking about physically visiting a real brick and mortar store. (That has been difficult during the pandemic but life is beginning to return to normal.)

Some people even refer to shopping as “Retail Therapy.” Medical professionals have discovered that there’s actually a good amount of psychological and therapeutic value in shopping.

Further research shows that when you make shopping decisions, you can help reinforce a sense of personal control over your environment. Shopping may also ease feelings of sadness and loneliness.

To your brain, shopping might feel like a reward. It can trigger your brain to produce mood changing endorphins. These endorphins can make depression feel less severe, but only for a short time. Unfortunately, shopping is not a permanent cure for depression.

I'm not a big shopper myself but I love to find new and useful gadgets. I used to do a lot of traveling for my blue-collar job. I worked with a small crew of (it happened to be) guys. We mostly worked at night and had our days free. In almost every city we visited, we would, collectively, visit a major hardware store. As a group, we would spend an hour or two browsing through the tools section.

Occasionally I would find a new tool that either I had never seen before, or was better than a version I already had. Of course, I would buy it and it made me happy.

When we buy things, we expect those purchases to have a life changing effect on us. This is because advertisers have exposed us to a deluge of commercials, ads, billboards, and product placements. They claim that when we purchase their item, that will have a transformative effect on us. Our lives will change for the better.

Unfortunately, life doesn't work that way and possessions alone will not make you happy.

### 43. *Sing*

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*Depression is like a heavy blanket. It covers all of me, and it's hard to get up. But there's comfort in it too. I know who I am when I'm under it.*

— Unknown Author

According to the experts (who are these experts?), singing has the ability to alter your mood and evoke memories and feelings. Singing provides an emotional release, and a way to express your thoughts and feelings. There is a release of endorphins which soothes your nerves and just makes you feel better.

Singing has also been shown to improve your sense of happiness and wellbeing. People feel much more positive after singing out loud than they do after passively listening to music (see Strategy 24 – Listen to Music).

In some psychological books, part of the definition of singing is, “A psychosocial activity shown to improve social support, increase positive emotions, and reduce fatigue and stress.”

And singing also has positive physical affects.

You probably know about the benefits of deep breathing from your yoga or gym classes. But besides that, singing can also get a whole range of muscles working including the abdominals and intercostals.

Regular and controlled breathing helps you to relax and can reduce your risk of heart disease. This is especially true if you sing with others.

Now the big question: Why do people sing in the shower?

The primary reason people sing in the shower is because it is usually a time when they can be alone, completely relaxed, and uninhibited. (And the echo effect of the tiled walls is awesome.)

## 44. *Sleep*

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*The darkness must go down the  
river of night's dreaming.*

*Flow morphia slow, let the sun  
and light come streaming*

*Into my life. Into my life.*

— Richard O'Brien

**Over at the Frankenstein Place**

**Rocky Horror Show**

When it comes to depression, sleep is a quadruple-edged sword (is that actually a thing?):

- For me, when I am tired, it's almost impossible to feel good. I definitely feel better when I can take a nap during the day.
- For some people, when they are depressed, all they want to do is sleep. And no amount of sleep will help.
- For others, their bodies refuse to go to sleep. Insomnia is a constant problem. They may even try narcotic sleeping pills which have the danger of addiction.



- Some can only sleep a few hours at a time. They are wide awake in the middle of the night, for an hour or more, then go back to sleep. This is called sleep segmentation.

There are many ways sleep can be a problem.

Those who study sleep (sleep scientists?) might tell you that you can't "catch up" on sleep. That you can't spend several days sleeping less than you normally would (or going without), then "catch up" by sleeping for 24 hours straight.

That may be true but I can tell you that, after a stressful week, I have slept for about 18 hours and woke up feeling a lot better. I think that I may have been too tired to even know I was a little depressed. But I woke up with a surge of energy and set about to tackle an overdue task.

If you ever do sleep for an extended period of time, don't lament and think that you wasted the day away. That, in itself, may bring on your depression. Instead, enjoy feeling better and take advantage of any energy that has magically rematerialized.

One more thing. My main reasons for not being able to fall asleep is (1) the nagging feeling of having forgotten something or (2) knowing I need to do something but would forget when I wake up. I've learned to keep pen and paper by my bedside. For me it's been a life saver.

Remember that monsters don't sleep under the bed, they sleep inside your head.

## *45. Celebrate Small Victories*

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*In addition to my other  
numerous acquaintances, I have  
one more intimate confidant...  
My depression is the most  
faithful mistress I have known  
— no wonder, then, that I return  
the love.*

— Søren Kierkegaard  
Philosopher

Remember the first Strategy in this book (Two Steps Forward – One Step Back)? That’s where I gave you this advice: “Don’t be surprised that for every step toward progress there will be slippage.”

So, if there is a good chance your depression may not completely go away after trying some of the Strategies in this book (unfortunately there is) then how do you keep yourself motivated?

The answer is: If any of these Strategies help you reduce your depression, even for a short period of time, even if it is only a small win, then celebrate immediately.

Not everything you do will be a big win towards coping with your depression. But if something good happens then go with it. My advice is, “Reward yourself!”

Why should you do this? When your brain expects a reward, dopamine is released. Dopamine is called the “feel-good” hormone. It gives you a sense of pleasure. It also gives you the motivation to do something when you are feeling that pleasure. Dopamine is part of your reward system.

Some of the ways you can reward yourself are actually Strategies listed in this book:

Cook (5) or Eat (8) something delicious, if it is close by, go to your Real Happy Place (14), spend some time working on your Hobby (16), do something that makes you Laugh (18), get a Massage (22), have Sex (40), go Shopping (42).

Of course, there are hundreds of ways to reward yourself. Everyone has different activities that they love and that makes them happy. Rewarding yourself for small accomplishments can go a long way.

## *46. Write Your Own Song*

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*If you are depressed, you are living in the past. If you are anxious, you are living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the present.*

— Lao Tzu  
Philosopher

Songs are poetry set to music.

When I was in high school, I wrote poetry. Boy, was that depressing in itself. But it served its purpose. It allowed me to purge myself of the emotions that were brought on by the release of my teenage hormones.

Writing poetry is one way to cope with depression. Poetry allows you to express yourself in ways that are very different from other means of communication. This can be a self-guided therapy that helps you to heal from your depression.

During your bouts with depression, writing poetry can provide some relief and boost your morale. It is not for everyone but, if you can't express yourself verbally, then it can provide an outlet for your feelings.

You can write poetry just for yourself, kind of like a personal diary or journal. Or you can share it with others. It can be rhymed or free-verse. The important thing is that none of that matters, your poetry is mainly just for you.

Nowadays, I choose to write lyrics for songs. That is my preferred form of expression. But, because lyrics are best when set to music, I don't start from scratch. I am not a composer so I "borrow" melodies from songs I like. Then, just listening to the melody (and ignoring the existing lyrics), I write a totally new narrative in the form of my own lyrics. (It may be cheating a little but it works for me.)

When I am lucky enough to work with a music composer, I give them my lyrics but I do not tell them that those lyrics are based on another song. If the composer winds up creating a melody, it will be different from what I started with. The composer and I have created a totally new song.

Whether or not my lyrics are read or heard by others, what is important to me is that I have found an outlet to express my feelings. And that makes me feel better.

## *47. Feel the Sun (Weather Permitting)*

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*There is no point treating a depressed person as though she were just feeling sad, saying, 'There now, hang on, you'll get over it.' Sadness is more or less like a head cold – with patience, it passes. Depression is like cancer.*

— Barbara Kingsolver  
Novelist, Author of “The Bean Trees”

It turns out that when you don't get to feel enough sun, as in the winter, you can actually come down with an ailment called Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

But, does getting enough sun have the opposite effect? Yes, it does!

Scientific research has shown that exposure to the sun can help people with anxiety and depression. When you get plenty of sunshine, your brain produces more of the feel-good chemical serotonin. Serotonin is a natural antidepressant. This increase in serotonin is associated with better mental health.

Not only does your increase in sun exposure increase your level of serotonin, it also increases your levels of melatonin. Melatonin, combined with serotonin, really helps you to fall sleep. So, get some sunlight during the day so you can sleep at night. (see Strategy 44 – Sleep)

Other physical effects of getting some sun are increased vitamin D, stronger bones, and lower blood pressure.

And, of all the elements in our environment, sunshine has the greatest impact on your disposition, more than rainfall, temperature, or any other weather occurrence.

## ***48. Think Less/Don't Overthink***

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*If I can't feel, if I can't move,  
if I can't think, and I can't  
care, then what conceivable point  
is there in living?*

**— Kay Redfield Jamison  
American Clinical Psychologist  
and Writer**

The title of this Strategy is an interesting piece of advice. Notice, however that this Strategy is Don't Overthink, not Don't Think.

Overthinking is when your mind is overly focused on a particular incident, usually in the past, for too much or for too long. You are constantly rehashing past conversations, dwelling on the choices you made or didn't make, and getting trapped in a minefield of "what if" scenarios.

122 If you or someone you know needs help, call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Or you can text HOME to 741-741 for free, 24-hr support from the Crisis Text Line. (After July 2022 reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline by dialing 988)



While overthinking itself is not a mental illness, it is associated with syndromes that include depression, anxiety, eating disorders and substance abuse.

Unfortunately, especially if you are depressed, you will have disagreeable and unwelcome thoughts (see Strategy 39 – Sad Thoughts). They can prevent you from enjoying what you are doing, they can divert your attention away from the really important stuff, and they can sap your energy. It puts you on the road to increased depression, anxiety, worry, stress, and analysis paralysis.

Analysis paralysis happens when you overthink to the point where you are presenting yourself with too many options within too many scenarios. You give yourself so many choices that you end up unable to choose one and make a decision.

You become so overwhelmed that, even if you could make a decision, it would probably be the wrong one. The other option is that you don't make any decisions at all and are paralyzed by the analysis.

Overthinking is also exhausting. Believe it or not, your brain burns about 100 calories an hour when you are concentrating. It takes even more mental energy than that to overthink. Even though you are only thinking, it becomes physically fatiguing and your energy level drops.

So, what can you do to stop overthinking? As soon as you realize that you are doing it, you need to distract yourself and divert your attention. Immediately choose one of the other Strategies in this book, preferably one that involves doing something physically. If you can concentrate on that new activity, it will stop what you were overthinking about.

## 49. *Plan a Dream Vacation*

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*Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off – then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.*

— Herman Melville  
American Novelist,  
Including “Moby-Dick”

Those who research this kind of thing say people who travel often are happier (see Strategy 14 – Find a Real Happy Place), but just the anticipation of a vacation can give you pleasure – no trip necessary. It's all about the anticipation.

Planning your dream vacation definitely delivers a different kind of happiness than actually going on a vacation. But the time spent finding the perfect route, searching for the perfect accommodations, and choosing the sites and activities that you would love to see, can be a very pleasurable experience in itself. It can also act as an enjoyable temporary distraction from your day-to-day sadness or depression.

If you have the luxury of being able to not only plan your dream vacation, but to actually know that you will take that vacation sometime in the future, then the time you spend in the planning phase is even sweeter.

The anticipation of that future vacation can keep you motivated and excited for the delayed gratification of the trip. Think of it as “the light at the end of the tunnel.”

If you are depressed, knowing that there is something to look forward to, helps to improve your morale and give you something fun to think about.

Travelers who responded to a survey overwhelmingly believe that anticipating a planned trip provides significant mental health benefits and, because they are doing the planning themselves, it gives them a sense of control. And, you have the option of doing as much of the planning that you want to.

This Strategy is very personal to me. I love planning trips. I love doing the research. I love working out the schedule and details. And, I’ve done it enough times that I’m pretty good at it. My wife and I have had some fabulous trips. But enough about me.

Plan for that perfect dream vacation. And I hope that in the near future, you will have the opportunity to take that trip.

## *50. Drink Water / Stay Hydrated*

*Depression is like a war — you  
either win or die trying.*

— Anonymous

I'm originally from New York City but now I live in the desert (Las Vegas). It gets hot in the desert, and dry. We get plenty of reminders that everyone needs to stay hydrated. If you feel thirsty you are already dehydrated.

I know that when I am dehydrated, not only does it affect my body, it also affects my mind and my thinking process.

When you are dehydrated it is harder to concentrate, harder to have a coherent thought, harder to be happy, but a lot easier to be depressed.

Most of you are probably unaware that there is a direct relationship between depression and dehydration. In fact, dehydration is one of the most obvious symptoms of depression.

Dehydration can cause feelings of anxiety, depression, and fatigue. Obviously, to avoid dehydration, be sure to drink plenty of water and other fluids throughout the day. If you're feeling anxious and think you might be dehydrated, go ahead and drink some water.

Keeping yourself adequately hydrated is not a cure-all for depression or anxiety. But getting in the habit of drinking enough water daily will definitely help alleviate many of the causes and symptoms of mood instability.

In fact, it is dehydration that can affect your mental health in the most significant ways, so it is essential to drink water to avoid reaching that point. Your brain will thank you for providing it with enough water to properly perform its functions, which will, in turn, help stabilize your mental health.

Cheers!



# Afterward

So, there you have it: 50 Non-Medical Strategies for Coping with Depression.

I hope you have already tried some of them and they worked for you. However, none of these Strategies are a long-term cure for your depression. They are only a temporary fix. But, if you do enough of them, for long enough, you may discover that you are (for lack of a better word) happier and better able to cope with life.

As I mentioned earlier, be aware that not every strategy will work for everyone. And a technique that works for you sometimes may not work for you all the time.

That is why I wanted to give you choices. There are 50 Strategies in this book. If ten of them work for you then you are ahead of the game.

I wish you good luck and good mental well-being.

\* \* \*

As of this writing, this book is being sold exclusively by Amazon.

You probably know that authors, like me, love to receive your reviews.

Whether or not you purchased the printed version or the eBook, would you be kind enough to write a review.

Good reviews are more than welcome. But even bad reviews are helpful to me when writing the next version of this book.

Thank you again for reading.

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