

[depression](#)

Dealing with Depression During Coronavirus

In the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by hopelessness and despair. But these tips can help improve your mood and ease depression.



Understanding depression

If isolation, anxiety, economic uncertainty, and the daily onslaught of bad news generated by the coronavirus pandemic are taking a heavy toll on your mood, you're not alone. In the

U.S., nearly half the respondents to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation poll felt the pandemic was harming their mental health—and that picture is repeated around the world. The stress of social isolation, the worry about jobs, money, and health, and the profound feelings of loss that many of us are experiencing at the moment can trigger depression for the first time or exacerbate symptoms if you've already been diagnosed.

When you're suffering from depression, life can seem overwhelmingly bleak and hopeless. It can interfere with your ability to think straight, drain your energy, and make it difficult to get through the day. Even as some countries and regions begin to ease stay-at-home restrictions, it seems unlikely that life will fully return to normal any time soon. But no matter what constraints you're living under at the moment, these strategies can help you counteract loneliness, ease negative thoughts, improve your mood, and cope with symptoms of depression.

If you are feeling suicidal...

When depression makes you feel suicidal, your problems don't seem temporary, they seem overwhelming and permanent. But with time, you will feel better, especially if you get help. There are many people who want to support you during this difficult time, so please reach out!

Read [Suicide Help](#) or call **1-800-273-TALK** in the U.S. or visit [IASP](#) or [Suicide.org](#) to find a helpline in your country.

How COVID-19 affects depression

This is a distressing, uncertain time. Even as some places start to open up again after months of lockdown, the end may still seem a long way off. You may have [lost your job](#), be struggling financially, and worried about if and when the economy will pick up. You could be grieving the loss of loved ones or the life you knew before the pandemic, or feeling frustrated and cut off by continued social distancing. Living in the age of coronavirus can have a profound effect on your mood.

[\[Read: Coronavirus Mental Health Toolkit\]](#)

Isolation and loneliness fuels depression. Human beings are social creatures. Being cut off from the love, support, and close contact of family and friends can trigger depression or

make existing symptoms worse. Months of social distancing and sheltering at home can leave you feeling isolated and lonely, having to face your problems alone.

A troubled relationship may be even worse than loneliness. While strong and supportive relationships are crucial for your mental wellbeing, being forced to spend months quarantined in a troubled, unhappy, or [abusive relationship](#) can be even more damaging to your mood than being alone.

Anxiety can lead to depression. All the fear and [uncertainty surrounding COVID-19](#) means it's natural to worry. When your worries spiral out of control, though, they can cause panic and anxiety. Since anxiety and depression are believed to stem from the same biological vulnerability, one can often lead to the other.

Stress levels are soaring. Experiencing a major change in your life, such the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, [being diagnosed with a serious illness](#), or financial or relationship difficulties, can bring overwhelming levels of stress. As a result of this pandemic, you may be experiencing *several* of these major stressors at once, making you more vulnerable to depression.

We're turning to unhealthy ways of coping. The boredom, loneliness and stress of being in lockdown, [struggling financially](#), or having to juggle a job and home school your kids, can prompt unhealthy ways of coping. Maybe you're drinking too much, abusing drugs, or overeating junk food in an attempt to self-medicate your mood and [deal with stress](#). While these methods may provide a brief respite, in the long-run they'll make your depression symptoms much worse. Instead, you can use the following healthy strategies to boost your mood and ease your depression.

Change your focus

There's no easy fix for recovering from depression, and finding the energy and motivation to take the first step can be tough. But you have more control over your mood than you may realize.

It's true that these are painful and worrying times, and few people have much to be cheerful about at the moment. But at the same time, depression can make things seem even worse than they really are. When you're depressed, everything is filtered through a lens of negativity. By simply recognizing that, you can start to change your focus and take the first step to feeling more optimistic.

Distract yourself. When you're depressed, out of work, and isolated from your social network, the negative thoughts running over and over in your head can seem never ending. But you can break the cycle by focusing on something that adds meaning and purpose to your life. Perhaps there's something you've always wanted to learn, like a new language or a musical instrument? Or perhaps you've always wanted to write a novel, [take up cooking](#), or grow your own vegetables? Focusing on a project or goal, even a small one, can give you a welcome break from negative thoughts and worries—and add a sense of meaning to your days.

Find simple sources of joy. While you can't force yourself to have fun, you can push yourself to do things that will boost your mood throughout day. Try listening to uplifting music (even getting up and dancing around if you can) or [finding a reason to laugh](#) by watching funny videos on YouTube or episodes of your favorite sitcom. Spending time in nature—whether it's walking in the park, paddling on the beach, or going for a hike—can ease stress and put a smile on your face, even if you're alone. Or try playing with your kids or a pet—they'll benefit as much as you will.

Limit your consumption of news. Yes, you want to stay informed, but overconsuming sensationalistic news or [unreliable social media coverage](#) will only fuel your negativity and fear. Limit how often you check news or social media and confine yourself to reputable sources.

Maintain a routine. Sleeping too much or too little, skipping meals or exercise, and neglecting your personal care only feeds into your depression. Establishing and maintaining a daily routine, on the other hand, adds structure to your day, even if you're alone and out of work. Try to include set times for exercising, spending time outside, and communicating with friends each day.

Express gratitude. When you're depressed, especially at this awful time, it can seem that everything in life is bleak and hopeless. But even in the darkest days, it's usually possible to find one thing you can be grateful about—the beauty of a sunset or a phone call from a friend, for example. It sounds cheesy but acknowledging your gratitude can provide a respite from negative thinking and really boost your mood. For a meditation to help you develop this habit, [click here](#).

Find new ways to engage with others

Meeting friends and family in person is still difficult for many of us at the moment, but that

doesn't mean you have to resign yourself to feeling isolated and alone. While nothing beats the mood-boosting power of face-to-face contact, chatting over a video link, on the phone, or via text can still help you feel more connected. Reach out to close friends and family, take this opportunity to look up old friends, or schedule online get-togethers with groups of people. Even if your depression symptoms make you want to retreat into your shell, it's vital you regularly stay in contact with people.

How to really CONNECT with others

Whether you're talking with a friend or loved one at a social distance, via video, or on the phone, it's important to strive for more than just a surface connection. The deeper the connection you establish, the more you'll both benefit.

Move beyond small talk. To really establish a connection that will ease your loneliness and depression, you need to take a risk and open up. Sticking to small talk and limiting yourself to a surface connection with others can actually make you feel even lonelier.

Share about yourself. Open up about what you're going through, the feelings you're experiencing. It won't make you a burden to the other person. Rather, your friend or loved one will most likely be flattered that you trust them enough to confide in them, and it will only deepen the bond between you.

Nothing needs to get "fixed". Depression relief comes from making a connection and being heard by someone. The person you talk to doesn't need to come up with solutions, they just listen to you without judging or criticizing. And the same is true when you're listening to them.

Adopt healthy daily habits

Your daily habits can play a big role in helping you to overcome depression. During this health crisis, it's tempting to slip into bad habits, especially if you're stuck at home and not able to work. You may sleep irregular hours, overeat to relieve the stress and boredom, or drink too much to fill the lonely evenings. But by adopting a healthier daily routine, you can bolster your mood, feel more energized, and relieve symptoms of depression.

Get moving. Exercising is one of the last things you feel like doing when you're depressed—but it's also one of the most effective ways of boosting your mood. In fact, regular exercise can be just as effective as antidepressant medication in relieving depression. Even if you're still under lockdown or a stay-at-home order, there are [creative](#)

[ways to fit movement](#) into your daily routine.

Practice relaxation techniques. Incorporating a [relaxation technique](#) such as meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, or a [breathing exercise](#) into your daily schedule can provide a welcome break from the cycle of negative thinking, as well as relieve tension and anxiety.

Eat a mood-boosting diet. In times of stress, we often turn to “comfort foods” packed with unhealthy fats, [sugar, and refined carbs](#). But these foods, along with too much caffeine and alcohol, can adversely impact your mood. Instead, focus on fresh, wholesome foods whenever possible and increase your intake of mood-enhancing nutrients such as [omega-3 fatty acids](#).

Sleep well. Just as depression can impact your quality of sleep, poor sleep can also contribute to depression. When you’re well rested, it’s easier to maintain your emotional balance and have more energy and focus to tackle your other depression symptoms. Changing your daytime habits and bedtime routines can help [improve how well you sleep at night](#).

Use reminders to keep yourself on track. When you’re depressed, it’s easy to forget the small steps that can help to lift your mood and improve your outlook. Keep reminders of the tips that work for you on your phone or on sticky notes around your home.

Authors: Lawrence Robinson and Melinda Smith, M.A.

[Will you help keep HelpGuide free for all?](#)

One in four people will struggle with mental health at some point in their lives. And with the coronavirus pandemic and troubled economy, many are in crisis right now. More than ever, people need a trustworthy place to turn to for guidance and hope. That is our mission at HelpGuide. Our free online resources ensure that everyone can get the help they need when they need it—no matter what health insurance they have, where they live, or what they can afford. But as a nonprofit that doesn’t run ads or accept corporate sponsorships, we need your help. If you have already contributed, thank you. If you haven’t, please consider helping us reach those who need it: [Donate today from as little as \\$3](#).

Last updated: May 2020



Get more help

[COVID-19 Lockdown Guide](#) - Tips on managing anxiety and isolation. (ADAA)

[Nurturing our relationships during the coronavirus pandemic](#) - Tips on maintaining healthy relationships at this time. (Mental Health Foundation)

Helplines and online support groups

In the U.S.: Find [DBSA Online Support Groups](#) or call the [NAMI Helpline](#) for support and referrals at 1-800-950-6264.

UK: [Sane](#) offers a number of online support forums or call the [Mind Infoline](#) at 0300 123 3393.

Australia: Find [Online Support Groups](#) or call the [SANE Help Centre](#) at 1800 18 7263.

India: Call the Vandrevala Foundation [Helpline \(India\)](#) at 1860 2662 345 or 1800 2333 330.

Canada: Call [Mood Disorders Society of Canada](#) at 519-824-5565

Suicide prevention help

In the U.S.: Call [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255

UK and Ireland: Call [Samaritans UK](#) at 116 123

Australia: Call [Lifeline Australia](#) at 13 11 14

Other countries: Visit [IASP](#) or [Suicide.org](#) to find a helpline near you