

■ Using an activity diary

Keeping a diary of daily activities can be especially useful when you are depressed because it helps you to focus on how you are spending your time, reminds you what you have done, and is a useful way of planning ahead. Use the weekly diary sheet on the next page.

1 Plan what you are going to do the next day:

Write down a list of activities that you would like to do and then schedule them into the diary. It is helpful to do this the night before and to plan each part of the day on an hourly basis.

2 Plan activities that are absorbing and not too difficult:

If you are feeling depressed it is sometimes difficult to become absorbed by reading a book but is more easily to be absorbed by for example watching a video (see Pleasant Activity List).

3 Plan a mixture of activities that have a balance between duty and pleasure:

Try to introduce more pleasurable items into your schedule. These might include small items such as having a leisurely bath, or larger items such as going out and meeting a friend.

4 Break tasks down into smaller steps:

Do not tidy the whole house, but rather break it down into 'vacuum lounge carpet' or 'tidy kitchen surfaces'.

5 Plan activities that increase your physical activity levels:

For instance, walking the dog or walking to the shop, mowing the lawn or cycling. Physical activities are very important for producing brain chemicals that are natural anti-depressants. Research shows that exercise has a positive effect on people's mood and releases feelings of tension, frustration and anger. Exercise also improves sleeping, physical health and the body's immune system.

6 Be flexible:

Try to keep to your plan as much as possible but allow yourself flexibility. If you have missed an activity proceed to the next one.

7 Increase frequency:

the number of activities that you do during the day, building up very slowly.

8 Record your sense of pleasure (P) and achievement (A) for each activity:

Rate both pleasure and achievement on a scale of 0 to 5, where 5 is either much pleasure or much achievement and 0 is no pleasure or no achievement.

9 Work towards goals:

Work out a number of short and long-term goals for different areas of your life. This helps activity planning and increases motivation. Always write your goals down.

■ Achieving everyday tasks

Being depressed often means that you have put off doing the simplest of things. These small jobs pile up and sometimes you might feel overwhelmed. The following steps are to help you reduce this mountain and turn it into smaller molehills.

1 Write down on a list all the tasks that you feel you need to do.

2 Prioritise. Do not try to do everything at once, only do one thing at a time. Identify what needs to be done first.

3 Break the task down into specific steps.

4 Rehearse each task, picture yourself performing the task in your mind.

5 Anticipate difficulties. Write down any practical difficulties that might come up.

6 Deal with negative thoughts. Identify the negative thoughts and then challenge them.

7 Start at the beginning.

8 Reward yourself for your success. Tick off the things that you have achieved and reward yourself with small rewards throughout the day such as a coffee, watching your favourite television programme or reading the newspaper.