Tips to Help Manage Depression

Everyone feels down, sad or dissatisfied sometimes. It is also common to experience changes in sleep, irritability, and energy level during times of stress or when things go wrong. Most of the time, our mood shifts back to baseline within a couple weeks or when our situation changes. Depression is different than going through life's ups and downs. You might be experiencing depression if you notice low mood and reduced enjoyment in life almost every day, for weeks at a time.

As emergency responders, it is critical to recognize signs of depression in yourself or others and know what steps to take.

Symptoms of depression, (https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression) can be very different for different people. Some people have many symptoms while others may only have a few. For a clinical diagnosis to be made, symptoms must be present for 2 weeks or longer and result in significant distress or cause problems functioning in important areas of life such as work, school, or family.

**Physical Symptoms**
- Changes in weight or appetite.
- Fatigue, feeling like even small tasks take high effort.
- Anxiety, restlessness, being wound up.
- Slowed thinking, speaking or movement.
- Problems sleeping -OR- sleeping too much.

**Psychological Symptoms**
- Anger, irritability, loss of patience over small things.
- Loss of enjoyment or loss of interest in activities.
- Difficulty experiencing positive emotions.
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or hopelessness.
- Feeling sad, numb, flat, or empty.
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions.
- Thoughts of not wanting to live, death, or suicide.

**Behaviors that signal depression for some people**
- Increased alcohol or drug use.
- Adrenaline-seeking.
- Isolation or withdrawal from others.
- Problems managing anger.
- Avoiding down time, focusing on work.
- Reduced self-care, not taking care of your space.
- Recklessness or not caring what happens.
- Suicidal behaviors or attempts.

If you think you might be experiencing symptoms of depression, consider taking an anonymous Free mental health tests from Mental Health America [https://mhanational.org/](https://mhanational.org/).

Please note that results of the test do not provide a diagnosis. It can be helpful to discuss results of the screening with a therapist or medical provider to start a conversation about treatment.

**Find treatment.** Treatment for depression works. There are a range of treatments options to choose from including talk therapy, medications, or both. Learn more about treatment options at [https://screening.mhanational.org/content/how-do-you-treat-depression](https://screening.mhanational.org/content/how-do-you-treat-depression).

**Stay active.** Research has shown that exercise can have a powerful positive impact on depression symptoms by boosting endorphins and supporting other changes that improve mood. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/04/24/exercise-depression/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/04/24/exercise-depression/)

**Address Sleep.** Sleep and mood are closely linked. Problems falling asleep, staying asleep, waking too early, or sleeping too much are common among people experiencing depression and can make symptoms worse. [https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-get-better-sleep-5094084](https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-get-better-sleep-5094084)

**Connect.** Depression can cause us to avoid interacting with others. This can create a cycle of disconnection and lower mood. Building and maintaining relationships can be especially important during the off-season when we shift from working on a team to a less interactive lifestyle. Be proactive about developing interests and maintaining relationships. Fighting depression can often require doing things at times we feel the least like doing them. Keep fighting and get help if you are struggling!

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide or are in distress, dial 988 for free, confidential support available 24/7.

To learn more about the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and suicide prevention efforts visit: [https://988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org)