

DO YOU FEEL DOWN?
IS SOMETHING NOT RIGHT?

No better time to take the
JOY CHALLENGE

Step 1 For Depression Reversal

“The troubled person is led to believe that he can’t help himself and must seek out a professional healer when confronted with distress related to everyday problems of living...he accepts the view that emotional disturbances arise from forces beyond his grasp.” Aaron Beck

BUT DON'T BUY IT!

Something doesn't feel right.
My energy is gone. My motivation is lost.
Life and the things I loved are turning gray and tasteless.
Regular life has me overwhelmed!

Have you ever felt this way? Maybe even now? It may happen ever so slowly—so slowly that most people ignore it for far too long. They heroically push themselves beyond the brink, only to find they've gone too far. They are stuck with a complicated problem. Depression has hit, and often it is stubborn and deep-rooted; sometimes taking years to heal. But you can take action early, even a little action now can get you on the right path. You can begin reversing things, starting even today life can get better!

So why not take the Joy Challenge? Reading this booklet shows you have begun the process of reversing depression (or even preventing depression in the first place)! This booklet is short and simple. Read it a section at a time or read as much as you have energy for. When you finish each section check the box. That's right, check the box and smile that you read it. Smile? Are you kidding?! Yes, smile, even pretend to smile if that's all you can do. Turn the corners of your mouth up slightly and fake it if you have to, but do it. Remember; check and smile.

Then there is one other task. Communicate with somebody. Text, e-mail, call, or meet someone and share what you have learned. If you only read one section in a day then share something from that one section. Find the safest person you know and say to them "I'm reading a book and have an assignment to share something I learned. May I share it with you?"

Doing this booklet will put you miles ahead in getting ready for a counseling session if you plan to do that. So take the challenge, and give it some energy, whatever energy you might have. Things are bound to get better. You will get stronger. Life will be sweeter. Let's go!

DEPRESSION: NOT A MYSTERY

It's true...most depression is not mysterious. It is a normal and natural problem that occurs when something or some things are not going right. What kind of things? That will come later, but first let's consider what you might have heard. Many people are told that depression is a chemical imbalance, specifically a serotonin deficiency. While this may be true for some people, it is even more important to realize that depression is about your heart and mind. Many studies show that changing the way you think can be more beneficial than getting the right medicine.

For many years, thanks to Freud, depression was viewed as coming from deep-rooted anger that

took years to sort out and sometimes was never resolved. However, this view proved unhelpful. For many more years the biomedical view dominated, and depression was seen as an imbalance of body chemistry. While this is partly right it, it can easily hinder people, and prevent them from learning the skills to make themselves well, and stay well.

Today, fortunately, depression is no longer seen as an intangible mystery treatable only by specialists. Cognitive therapy, helps people change their thinking, and thus their feeling, without relying on substances or circumstances. Cognitive therapy (combined with behavioral therapy) has proved to be the most effective approach for depression. Through changing themselves people not only get better, they get stronger.

Look at your situation like this: You have begun a journey. Depression will be the arena to discover new things about yourself and life. Something meaningful is on its way. You are not suffering in vain. Your life is about to get more balanced and your potential will grow as you handle this situation right.

In most cases of depression, it's that simple. This is not a disease. This is not a mystery. This is not something to be ashamed of. You can learn to beat this thing.

KNOW YOUR ADVERSARY

What are the most obvious signs of depression? You feel gloomy, lonely, or apathetic. You may cry for no apparent reason. You may have trouble with sleep or eating patterns. You may feel constantly tired. You most definitely see yourself in a negative way— that you are helpless, alone, or have no future. You may feel irritable, have no interest in sex, or have unexplained physical problems like back pain or headaches. For that matter you may simply feel bored with life. There are actually many possible signs of depression. And an often overlooked fact is that each depression is unique— a unique combination of causes and a unique mix of symptoms!

Sometimes symptoms are so severe that it's obvious something isn't right. Other times you may feel generally miserable or vaguely unhappy without really knowing why. For what it's worth, the dictionary of psychological problems (DSM IV in the USA or ICD in the UK) classifies a major depressive disorder as feeling down or disinterested for at least two weeks, plus also having at least four of the following symptoms:

- Sleep disorder
- Change in weight or appetite
- Fatigue/loss of energy
- Psychomotor retardation/agitation

- Difficulty concentrating/indecisiveness
- Guilt/low self-esteem
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

But it's important to remember that there is no medical diagnostic test for depression—no blood sample or examination to reveal it. Depression is not hard science, although sometimes the medical world portrays it that way. Rather than the view of “having or not having depression”, consider that everyone is on a continuum. Even the perfectly happy person may be set up, or be setting themselves up, to advance on the continuum to a more depressed state. So what should you do? First, you must become more self-aware—you must understand the condition of your mind. Second, you must make decisions that counter a depressed state. Simply put, understand your needs and learn how to get those needs met.

Life is a lot like a game of chess: each move should be thoughtfully considered. We check our vulnerability, and as things change, we check our vulnerability again. Many people forget this. They have no idea a checkmate is only a move away.

Do you know what you need? Are there signs that your needs are not getting met?

TRIAD OF CAUSE

So what causes depression? As said before, there are many different causes and many mixes of these causes. (But don't get discouraged, don't feel lost—answers will come!) What is critical to realize is that you are not helpless in defending yourself against the causes. Most cases of depression are primarily due causes we will call the “triad of cause”. One of these is likely dominant in your depression. By addressing these causes, you can reverse depression, thwart relapse, or even prevent it in the first place.

First in the triad, is lifestyle. Lifestyle has to do with how well you take care of yourself. Do you understand your needs and are you protecting yourself adequately. How much stress are you under? Most people over-stressed, and unaware of it. Pressure at work, school examinations, difficult marriages, parenting struggles, financial crisis, and what about mother-in-laws? Anything that gets you excited or anxious adds to stress. This means your system is pumping adrenaline. Adrenaline helps us function at high speed, but long term it abnormally burns our system, both physically and mentally. The result—we unconsciously break ourselves.

So what do you do? After all, you cannot change your environment easily. You cannot quit your precious job, or change your insensitive spouse, or disown your problematic child (and we won't

even talk about that pesky mother-in-law...). You cannot easily change what is around you, but there is something you can do—you can change the way it affects you inside. Attention must be given as to how to lower your frustration level so you feel less stress and more tranquility. (And well, maybe you can get rid of that mother-in-law too—before you completely lose your mind!)

The second cause in the triad is grief. Grief is good—it is a healthy response to loss. Whenever you lose something you are supposed to feel sad. It could be loss of anything from a computer file or youthful complexion to a bankruptcy or death of loved one. Whether it's a large loss or small loss we need time to process it. First we must acknowledge that it was something of value, something precious, something we will miss. We must allow ourselves the time to feel pain, and even anger. If we skip this, or cut short the sorrow, we will pay later— it will come out somehow or another.

You may have experienced a loss that you should have grieved for several months and only allowed yourself a week. This is a very common mistake for busy people in a busy society. In the grief process you must allow adequate time to embrace the pain before you can enter the next stage; acceptance.

In acceptance we understand the hole in our life and determine that we must live with it. It can never be completely filled with something else, but we will survive somehow. Finally we must begin to rebuild our lives and thinking within this new reality. The experience can be complete agony, and finding people who understand, care, and support us during this process is a huge help.

The third cause in the triad is thinking. Is negative thinking a symptom of depression, or is it the source of depression? Are we depressed and then get negative, or vice versa? This is the question that revolutionized the approach of Aaron Beck, father of Cognitive Therapy. His answer was that depression was not a result of anger (Freud), or brain chemistry (pharmaceutical industry), but of bad thinking. Depressives think terrible things about themselves and their futures, so they start feeling terrible, and then they start experiencing just what they feared in their heads in the first place. Your thinking determines how depressed you will get. How you think about your problems will either aggravate or relieve depression. Dwelling on problems clearly triggers depression and keeps it robust.

Are you rehearsing the negative things in your life? Don't get down on yourself if you are. Stop! Remember you are doing something positive by reading this book. And look—you've finished half of it! Check your box and smile!

WON'T MEDICINE FIX IT?

Perhaps you're thinking, "But all this sounds like work. Won't just taking meds make me feel better?" Not necessarily. In reality medication only helps about half those who take them. Chances are 50/50 that you will feel better. But there is another possibility: You may actually feel worse because medications often lead to complications. The two most common complaints are weight gain and loss of sexual interest. Consider these scenarios: A person struggling with a poor marriage has succumbed to depression. They take anti-depressants and the sexual part of their marriage crumbles, so their marriage gets even worse—more reason to get depressed. Or a person with a self-image problem that has contributed to their depression—they take anti-depressants and end up fat. Now they are struggling even more with a negative self-view and deeper depression. Or a person in grief and needing to experience the low of sadness to complete their grief process and live life healthy again. They take anti-depressants which bring their mood up but sabotage the grief process—now a bigger depression may be waiting down the road.

It seems odd that although anti-depressants are more available now than ever, the problem of depression only grows bigger each year. Drugs don't seem to be working the great miracles we wish they would. You want to take medicine because it seems like the quickest solution. The physician and the health insurance system want you to take the medicine because it is the easiest solution. But it may not be the best solution.

Drugs may lift the mood of half of those that take them, but some research indicates that the dominant reason for the success of drugs is the placebo effect. In other words, we believe they will help us, and it is actually that thought in our mind, that makes us better. Before you turn to medication in hope of a quick cure realize that countless people find relief without any drugs at all. Some have found a cure in exercise, others in nutrition, some in music, others in prayer. Whatever route you take, good counseling only makes the chance of reversing your depression even better because counseling empowers your mind.

Your mind has power to protect you from depression, and your mind may even be a big part of why drugs seems to work. So shouldn't changing your mind be where you start? But change what?

CAUTION: If you are already taking medications, by no means stop without the guidance of a doctor and a realistic tapering program. The result of sudden quitting can be extremely hazardous.

TRIAD OF NEGATIVISM

Is there a particular thought pattern to depression? Actually, Aaron Beck found that depressed

people typically had a common pattern of thinking three specific negative ideas. The three negative ideas are called the cognitive triad of negativism. Beck reasoned that if these ideas could be exposed and challenged, depression could be reversed. This became the basis of cognitive treatment and recovery. The three ideas are actually simple:

- Personal: It's my fault. I am defective and inadequate.
- Pervasive: It will negatively affect my whole life and no matter what happens something is bad.
- Permanent: It's always going to be like this. Things are hopeless and will never change.

In other words you tend to be pessimistic about yourself—you focus on your negative characteristics and blame yourself. You tend to be pessimistic about life in general—life will be dominated by negative influences and everything is bleak. And you tend to be pessimistic about the future—life is always going to be hard or unrewarding so what's the point of trying?

Negativism is like a virus that sneaks in imperceptibly and spreads. Some people are less immune to this virus. So who are the people at risk? That's right, pessimists. Pessimism can lead to depression. Not that pessimism is all bad. Pessimism is advantageous in helping people avoid inflated expectations and prepare well for reality. Pessimism is cautious and well-prepared. But pessimism is also dangerous. It sets you up for the triad of negativism. Some bad situation hits and you begin to spiral downward in the triad. You think negative thoughts, and then you think them again, and again, and...The negativism feeds the depression.

Are you pessimistic? Is it possible to change your personality? Not likely, and as mentioned, pessimism has valuable advantages. But it is definitely helpful to learn about becoming more optimistic. Optimism is a habit that can be learned. You can begin to see the other side of things, that there are always really good things too. Things potentially could have been much worse, suffering is never bereft of purpose and meaning, and miracles do happen. The goal then is not to try to throw away pessimism and become something you are not, but to become more optimistic about yourself, your future, your entire life, to become an "optimistic pessimist".

□ THE POWER OF JOY

For a Christian, the dominant quality of a God-filled life is love, and the second most obvious quality is joy. Joy is something bigger than mere happiness. Happiness depends on one's situation; when things are going well we feel happy, when things aren't going well we feel sad. But joy doesn't depend on situation. It's not something dependent on the outside, it's something dependent on the inside. Everybody wants to be happy, but happiness alone is a very frail position, when things sour our life can fall apart.

So how do you get joy? Everyone actually has the capacity to possess a certain degree of joy. Everyone can find some, even if it's only a little drop or tiny crumb, because this world has joy scattered all over the place in an array of colors and shapes. Like a honeybee flies from flower to flower collecting the raw material for sweet honey, we have the choice every moment to scour life for the raw material of joy. Joy is around many a corner, growing on many a tree, playing on many a playground. A new friend and future waits around the corner, a juicy fruit on some tree waits to be picked and tasted, some three year old is romping in a puddle at the park with their new red boots. When did you last experience the joy of really connecting with little treasures of life?

Or you can also look at it like this. We have each been equipped with a special muscle, a joy muscle, and we have the power to either exercise it, or neglect it—use it, or ignore it. Neglect your joy muscle and it will atrophy. But every time you take the time to note life's joys that muscle gets stronger, and using it gets easier. When you have a strong joy muscle, you become capable of seeing joy in things that the average person can't. The things people take for granted become sources of joy and strength for you. The feel of a hot bath, while someone else in the same water is ruminating on their problems, you are finding joy in this simple act of bathing. While others cram down their lunch, you savor the saltiness, sweetness, and spice, and you can even find joy in a simple slice of bread. Or while others might be at best analyzing the shape of the nearby mountain, you are experiencing the mass of that mountain in your heart and finding joy. It is rediscovering this joy-filled creation, even in the mundane, like a curious little child, that will bring joy to your heart. When bad things happen, joy is pulsating in our body and gives us stamina to weather it.

Depressed people have a wilted joy-muscle. They can't really taste, they can't really see, they have lost ability to feel. But by careful rehabilitation you can begin to reclaim your muscle, you can begin again to relive life. Learn from children, they are experts at mining joy from even trivia in their surroundings.

JOURNALING FOR REALITY

Now you have some things to watch for. In reading this booklet you know the dirt clods to avoid and the gold nuggets to search for. Here is where you will take charge of your life. Each day you will need to examine your life. When you feel particularly low, it is good to look at what you were doing and what you were thinking before that. When you feel particularly up, do the same and track your thoughts and actions. Here's the secret plot of this assignment. You will find that there are solid reasons for the way you feel. Your feelings are tied to your thoughts and actions. You may not have much control over your feelings, but you do have quite a bit of control over what you think about and the choices you make. In that sense, indirectly, you can control your feelings.

A common situation for the depressed is that their mood seems to come out of nowhere and they are at the mercy of it. People around the depressed person may easily see a criticism or disappointment or discouragement, but the person in depression represses the idea and just feels the low mood. Their mood seems detached from reality. This is not only frustrating but the seeming lack of control makes them feel even more depressed. However, mood changes do not come out of the blue, they are always caused, even if only by a distant memory.

Mood journaling will help you to begin sorting this out. There are good reasons for why you feel the way you do, and in reality you have far more control than you think.

Instructions:

When you have a shift in mood write it down (e.g., okay to sad), the externals (where were you, with whom, and what were you doing), internals (what were you thinking about or remembering), then how do you think a “normal” person would feel in this situation, and score how well your mood agrees with what a “normal” person felt (1 being no agreement, 10 being full agreement).

Date, Time	Mood Change	Externals (who, what, where)	Internals (thoughts, fantasies, memories)	“Normal” feelings	Mood/Feeling Agreement (1-10)

WHAT TO EXPECT WITH COUNSELING

Frankly, you may not need counseling at all! In making these adjustments to your life you may be well on your way to finding balance without an appointment, and without medication. Other people find they do need a little more. Sometimes, even just one appointment provides the boost they need

to push ahead for a more positive life.

If you decide to schedule an appointment with us there are a few things we would like you to understand:

First, we believe in you. We believe you have certain strengths and skills that are critical to you getting back on track. We have no magic wand or secret. We merely want to empower you and assist you in discovering and applying your strengths. Because of this one of the first questions we will ask you is; “Now, what is it that you would like to accomplish today?”

Second, we expect change to begin right away. You have the capacity to begin the change immediately. The real issue is your readiness. If you are ready for change things can happen, without your readiness we can't help you do much at all.

Third, remember that one session may be all you need (we call this Single Session Therapy). Perhaps you will need more sessions, or may benefit with one session and then joining our support groups. Whatever the case, know that we are committed to whatever is best for you, and we can be flexible for your unique need.

Last, we seek to offer this help as a service to the community and you. Everyone helping is a volunteer. The bottom line is not money, so you can be assured that monetary profit is not a factor, we want you to be well as soon as possible, no strings attached.

Now finally CELEBRATE! You finished the booklet! You can do it when you put your mind to it! Keep getting stronger and reclaiming the life you want.

Dr. Andy Meeko

Bi-lingual conference speaker and counselor specializing in helping ultra high-stress families and depression. Director of T3C in the Tokyo area where he oversees community-counselor training.

Sources

Beck, Aaron Cognitive Therapy of Depression (New York: Guilford Press, 1979)

Beck, Aaron Cognitive Therapy and the Emotional Disorders (New York: New American Library, 1976)

Glasser, William Warning: Psychiatry Can Be Hazardous to Your Health (New York: Harper-Collins, 2003)

Kirsch, Irving The Emperor's New Drugs (New York: Basic Books, 2010)

O'Connor, Richard Undoing Depression (New York: Berkley Books, 1999)

Seligman, Martin Learned Optimism (New York: Vintage Books, 2006)