

DEALING WITH DEPRESSION AFTER BRAIN INJURY

THINKING → FEELING

1. Self-awareness and Acceptance

- Accept “I am what I am.” Live in the here and now.
- Be aware of challenges, yet be sure to consistently appreciate your strengths.
- Write daily in a gratitude journal.
- Practice mindfulness meditation, daily prayer, and selective mantras to deal with sense of loss.

SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity to

Accept the things I cannot change;

Courage to change the things I can; and

Wisdom to know the difference.

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself.

I AM LARGE I CONTAIN MULTITUDES.

Walt Whitman, Song of Myself, 1855

2. Challenge Negative Thoughts and Perception

- Be aware of your thoughts and how you perceive things.
- Keep a thought journal and work at replacing automatic irrational thoughts with more balanced rational responses.
- Talk to someone about your problems.

Types of negative thinking that add to depression:

All-or-nothing thinking – Looking at things in black-or-white categories, with no middle ground (“If I fall short of perfection, I’m a total failure.”)

Overgeneralization – Generalizing from a single negative experience, expecting it to hold true forever (“I can’t do anything right.”)

The mental filter – Ignoring positive events and focusing on the negative. Noticing the one thing that went wrong, rather than all the things that went right.

Diminishing the positive – Coming up with reasons why positive events don’t count (“She said she had a good time on our date, but I think she was just being nice.”)

Jumping to conclusions – Making negative interpretations without actual evidence. You act like a mind reader (“He must think I’m pathetic”) or a fortune teller (“I’ll be stuck in this dead end job forever”)

Emotional reasoning – Believing that the way you feel reflects reality (“I feel like such a loser; therefore, I really am no good!”)

‘Shoulds’ and ‘should-nots’ – Holding yourself to a strict list of what you should and shouldn’t do, and beating yourself up if you don’t live up to your rules. The emotional consequence is guilt.

Labeling – Labeling yourself based on mistakes and perceived shortcomings (“I’m a failure; an idiot; a loser.”)

Personalization and Blame – You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event for which you were not primarily to blame (“My current ability after the brain injury is my fault.”)

“Once you choose hope, anything is possible.” – Christopher Reeve

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DOING / TAKING ACTION

3. Cultivate Supportive Relationships

- Isolation and loneliness only make depression worse.
- Turn to trusted friends and family members.
- Try to keep up with social activities even though you don't feel like it.

10 tips for reaching out and building relationships:

- Talk to one person about your feelings.
- Help someone else by volunteering.
- Have lunch or coffee with a friend.
- Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly.
- Accompany someone to the movies, a concert, or a small get-together.
- Call or email an old friend.
- Go for a walk with a workout buddy.
- Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club.

4. Take Care of Yourself

- Get enough sleep.
- Keep stress in check.
- Schedule a time each week to give to yourself.

Develop a 'Give to Your Self' toolbox:

- Spend some time in nature.
- Read a good book.
- Watch a funny movie or TV show.
- Take a long, hot bath.
- Obtain and play with a pet.
- Write in your journal.
- Listen to music.
- Cook yourself a good meal.

5. Be Active and Exercise

- The catch 22 of depression is with depression you do not feel like doing anything. However, the worst thing for depression is to sit in one place and do nothing but think negative thoughts.
- Do not sit in a place where you consistently think negative thoughts (i.e., staying in bed each morning).
- Neurobics – Complete daily exercises that cognitively challenge your brain.
- Exercise, exercise, exercise!!! Studies show that regular exercise can be as effective as antidepressant medication at increasing energy and improving feelings of being depressed.

6. Accept Needed Support

- Confide in a counselor, therapist, or clergy member.
- See a medical doctor or psychiatrist for medication management.

“Keep yourself busy if you want to avoid depression. For me, inactivity is the enemy” – Matt Lucas