

Straightforward Strategies for Managing Depression

From an EAP perspective, depression is one of the most common issues for which people access short-term counseling. Depression is the second most common mental health issue in the United States (anxiety is first). It is characterized by changes in mood, energy, appetite, concentration, sleeping patterns and thinking patterns, to include thoughts of suicide. According to the most recent data, 16.2 million people (or about 7%) in the U.S. have experienced a *major depressive episode* (including the symptoms noted above and lasting for two weeks or longer and having an impact on overall functioning) in the last year. A much higher percentage of people have endorsed some depressive symptoms presently or at some point in their past. While some people will find that their symptoms are best managed by medication and talk therapy, there are also other strategies that, when implemented, can be very effective in treating depression or depressive symptoms. Some of these include:

- **Get up and Exercise!** – research supports the notion that exercise frequently helps decrease depressive symptoms. As Dr. Miller, a psychiatrist and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School, notes, “Exercise supports nerve cell growth in the hippocampus, improving nerve cell connections, which helps relieve depression.” Additionally, 20-30 minutes of exercise/increased heart rate re-balances melatonin levels and enhances sleep.
- **Let’s Look at Nutrition** – like exercise, nutrition has been long-believed to have an impact on mood issues, specifically depression. A large scale recent study by Dr. Firth and colleagues at the University of Manchester and Western Sydney University discovered that weight loss, nutrient boosting and fat reduction diets can all reduce the symptoms of depression. This provides even more incentive for people to implement long-term nutritional changes to their regular diet as part of their routine lifestyle rather than chasing short-term, calorie/carb/fat restricting diets.
- **What a Difference a Healthy Activity Can Make** – simply put, when you get out and engage in enjoyable activities, especially with others, depressive symptoms generally decrease. It’s hard to enjoy yourself and feel depressed at the same time! This is helpful for any level of depression.
- **Want to Try a Prescription? Try Sleep** - Matthew Walker is a sleep scientist who recently wrote a book entitled [Why We Sleep](#). In the book, he goes over the hazards/costs of lack of sleep and discusses the numerous benefits of sleep. He noted that about 50% of adults report sleeping six hours or less a night, compared to only 8% reporting this amount of sleep in 1942. Regarding mental health, he notes the power of dreams, its connection to creativity, and how deep sleep is therapeutic in casting off the emotional charge (including depression) of our experiences. This sleep makes our difficult life experiences easier to bear. Walker notes that if he could only prescribe one thing, it would be eight hours of sleep per night. Are you up for the challenge?



To speak with an EAP counselor, please call (402) 398-5566 or (888) 847-4975.