



KeySolutions

Employee Assistance Program

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6 Common Depression Traps to Avoid *by Jennifer Soong*

Here are six behavioral pitfalls that often accompany depression and how you can steer clear of them as you and your doctor or therapist work on getting back on track.

Trap #1: Social Withdrawal – “When we’re clinically depressed, there’s a very strong urge to pull away from others and to shut down,” says Stephen Ilardi, PhD. “It turns out to be the exact opposite of what we need.”

“In depression, social isolation typically serves to worsen the illness and how we feel,” Ilardi says. “Social withdrawal amplifies the brain’s stress response. Social contact helps put the brakes on it.”

The Fix: Gradually counteract social withdrawal by reaching out to your friends and family. Make a list of the people in your life you want to reconnect with and start by scheduling an activity.

Trap #2: Rumination – Rumination involves dwelling and brooding about themes like loss and failure that cause you to feel worse about yourself. Rumination is a toxic process that leads to negative self-talk such as, “It’s my own fault. Who would ever want me as a friend?”

“There’s a saying, ‘When you’re in your own mind, you’re in enemy territory,’” says Mark Goulston, MD, psychiatrist. “You leave yourself open to those thoughts and the danger is believing them.”

Rumination can also cause you to interpret neutral events in a negative fashion. For example, when you are buying groceries, you may notice that the checkout person smiles at the person in front of you but does not smile at you, so you perceive it as a slight.

The Fix: Redirect your attention to a more absorbing activity, like a social engagement or reading a book.

Trap #3: Self Medicating With Alcohol – Turning to alcohol or drugs to escape your woes is a pattern that can accompany depression, and it usually causes your depression to get worse.

“Alcohol can sometimes relieve a little anxiety, especially social anxiety, but it has a depressing effect on the central nervous system,” Goulston says. “Plus, it can screw up your sleep. It’s like a lot of things that we do to cope with feeling bad. They often make us feel better momentarily, but in the long run, they hurt us.”

The Fix: Talk to your doctor or health provider if you notice that your drinking habits are making you feel worse. Alcohol can interfere with antidepressants and anxiety medications.

Trap #4: Skipping Exercise – When you are depressed, it’s unlikely that you will keep up with a regular exercise program, even though that may be just what the doctor ordered. “Exercise can be enormously therapeutic and beneficial,” Ilardi says. Exercise has a powerful antidepressant effect because it boosts levels of serotonin and dopamine, two brain chemicals that often ebb when you’re depressed.

“It’s a paradoxical situation,” Ilardi says. “Your body is capable of physical activity. The problem is your brain is not capable of initiating and getting you to do it.”

The Fix: Ilardi recommends finding someone you can trust to help you initiate exercise, a personal trainer, a coach or even a loved one. “It has to be someone who gets it, who is not going to nag you, but actually give you that prompting and encouragement and accountability,” Ilardi says.

Trap # 5: Seeking Sugar Highs – When you are feeling down, you may find yourself craving sweets or junk food high in carbs and sugar. “Sugar does have mild mood-elevating properties,” says Ilardi, “but it is only temporary.” Within two hours, blood glucose levels crash, which has a mood depressing effect.

The Fix: Avoid sugar highs and the inevitable post-sugar crash. It is always wise to eat healthily, but now more than ever, your mood can not afford to take the hit.

Trap #6: Negative Thinking – When you are depressed, you are prone to negative thinking and talking yourself out of trying new things.

You might say to yourself, “Well, even if I did A, B and C, it probably wouldn’t make me feel any better and it would be a real hassle, so why bother trying at all?”

“That’s a huge trap,” says Goulston. “If you race ahead and anticipate a negative result, which then causes you to stop trying at all, that is something that will rapidly accelerate your depression and deepen it.”

The Fix: Do not get too attached to grim expectations. “You have more control over doing and not doing, than you have over what the result of actions will be,” Goulston says. “But there is a much greater chance that if you do, then those results will be positive.”



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Dispelling Myths About Social Drinking

Enjoying wine, beer or spirits is a common activity in many social situations. Although alcohol can be viewed as a good way to relax and unwind, it's important to note that behavioral influences play an important role in determining how much alcohol a person consumes and its subsequent effect on activities and emotions.

To help gain an understanding of alcohol in social settings, Dr. Marlatt, who has conducted extensive research on social drinking, provides insight into some commonly held beliefs about alcohol consumption.

Myth #1: A person who drinks will be more sociable than a person who doesn't.

Reality #1: Although a drink or two can help an anxious person feel more relaxed, alcohol alone does not make a person more attractive, interesting or witty.

Dr. Marlatt says, for example, that men may think they're more attractive after having a few drinks. Yet when women are asked about these men, they don't agree.

Myth #2: People who drink can't help how they act.

Reality #2: Alcohol can have physical and emotional effects, but Dr.

Marlatt explains that a person's reactions to drinking are equally controlled by psychological perceptions.

"People have been conditioned to believe they'll react in certain ways if they consume alcohol," Dr. Marlatt said. "It's more about you and where you decide to put yourself that controls how you will act when drinking."

Myth #3: People feel better if they drink.

Reality #3: Although drinking provides a social and behavioral disinhibition which may be experienced as a stimulating effect, it has diminishing effects over time, including slow speech, reduced coordination and depression.

"People unrealistically think of alcohol as a magic elixir," Dr. Marlatt says. "They don't seem to remember the corresponding negative effects that go along with alcohol consumption, such as hangovers and depression."

Staying In Control: Being a smart social drinker requires staying in control, setting limits and realizing how your perceptions and surroundings can affect your behavior.

If you're planning to attend an event where you don't know many people, determine beforehand how many drinks you will have. By drinking slowly and being aware of your surroundings, you can stay in control and not feel easily swayed into drinking more than you normally might.

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Healthy Recipe: Turkey Panini

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 slices Italian bread
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 4 thin slices, peeled and cored apple
- 4 sprigs watercress, large stems removed
- 1 slice Asiago cheese
- 2 slices (about 2 ounces) cooked turkey
- 1 tablespoon cranberry sauce

NUTRITIONAL VALUE:

- 338 Calories Per Serving
- 14 g. Fat
- 5 g. Saturated Fat
- 39 g. Carbohydrates
- 27 g. Protein
- 2 g. Fiber

DIRECTIONS:

- Brush one side of each piece of bread with olive oil and lay the bread oil-side down on the work surface.
- Place the turkey, cheese, apple slices and cranberry sauce on top of one of the slices of the bread. Place the second slice of bread on top, oil-side up.
- Heat a grill pan over medium heat. Grill the sandwich on each side until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes per side.
- Transfer the sandwich to the work surface, lift one piece of bread and arrange the watercress inside, then replace the bread. Slice the sandwich in half and serve.

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