



THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

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Dealing With the Effects of Trauma: A Self-Help Guide

Things You Can Do Every Day to Help Yourself Feel Better

There are many things that happen every day that can cause you to feel sick, uneasy, sad, upset, anxious or irritated. You need to do things to help yourself feel better as quickly as possible, without doing anything that will have harmful results e.g. drinking, drugs, committing crimes, hurting yourself or risking your life.

Read through the following list. Test the ideas below and give each of them a chance when you need to help yourself feel better. Make a list of the ones that are useful and work for you and hang the list where you will see it every day (e.g. on your fridge or wall). Use these skills whenever you are having a hard time so that you can feel better. **Do something fun or creative.** Take time out to do something you really enjoy like arts, crafts, knitting, painting, drawing or woodwork. You could also read stories, magazines, comic books or you could do crossword puzzles. You could also play games, take photos, attend community events, go fishing, do the gardening or watch a movie.

- **Choose positive words and surroundings.** Choose to keep positive. Saying positive phrases such as 'Everyday gets better and better' or 'Feeling good today' helps to prevent negative feelings. Repeating positive words will help keep you positive and focused. Try to smile and laugh as much as you can because this will help to lift up your mood. Surround yourself with positive people and situations. Look for the good things in life instead of always looking for the bad and negative.
- **Get some exercise.** Exercise is a great way to help you feel better and lift your mood, while at the same time improving your health. Exercise can be fun, you could for example join a soccer club or organise to walk around your neighbourhood with a couple of friends. Other forms of exercise are gardening and housework.
- **Get enough sleep.** Go to bed at the same time every night and keep your bedroom dark and quiet. Drinking herbal tea like Rooibos or warm milk before bedtime may help you to fall asleep. Stay away from caffeine (coffee, normal tea, fizzy drinks like Coca Cola etc.) and sugar. You should also avoid exercising before bedtime.
- **Eat a healthy balanced diet.** Eat a variety of foods. A healthy meal includes protein (meat, chicken or fish), starch (potatoes, pap etc.) and vegetables. Try and eat small meals through the day, snacking on fruit and try not to eat too many high fat foods and oils (chips and chocolates). It is very important to avoid alcohol and drugs as they will leave you feeling worse and more depressed.
- **Write something.** Writing can also help you feel better. You can keep lists of everyday feelings and emotions, a record of your dreams and a list of what you do everyday and what you hope to achieve in the future. Don't worry about how well you write or your spelling, just let your thoughts flow. Writing about the trauma or traumatic events also helps you to release feelings and emotions. It allows you to safely process the emotions you are experiencing. It tells your mind that you are taking care of the situation and helps you to get rid of the stress associated with the trauma. Keep your notes in a safe place where others cannot read them. Only share your notes with those that you feel comfortable with. You may even want to write a letter to the person or people who have treated you badly, hurt or betrayed you telling them how they have made you feel. You don't have to send anybody this letter, it is just a way to help you progress and find peace.
- **Use your spiritual and personal resources.** For some people this means praying, going to church, or reaching out to a member of the church e.g. a pastor or youth leader. You could also read the Bible or religious scriptures or other inspirational materials. For many people it is important for them to have religion in their lives to give them faith, hope and courage. It's also important to allow your friends and family to help and support you.

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- **Keep to a routine.** It is important to keep in a regular everyday routine by doing simple things for example getting out of bed at the same time each day, making your bed, dressing, making breakfast, doing household jobs etc. Staying in bed the whole day will make you feel worse so you need to become active even if you are doing small, simple things.
- **Love yourself.** Wake up in the morning and even if you feel silly, look yourself in the mirror and say 'I love you'. It is important for you to love and take care of yourself. Don't blame yourself for things that have gone wrong or be hard on yourself for your past choices. Be patient with yourself by setting small realistic goals and when you achieve them be proud of yourself.
- **Wear something that makes you feel good.** Everybody has certain clothes or jewellery that they enjoy wearing. When you feel down you could wear your favourite clothes to help cheer you up or you could get your hair done. These small things will help make you feel good about yourself.
- **Get little things done.** It always helps you feel better if you have a goal and can accomplish something even if it's small. Think of some easy and simple things to do such as cleaning out your cupboard, dusting your tables, reading a page of your favourite book, starting a vegetable garden and doing some washing or cooking.
- **Learn something new.** Think about an issue that you are interested in. Find some information on it in the library. You could also look it up on the internet if you can. You could even attend a class to learn something new for example an art or beadwork class. You could also read your favourite poem or Bible scripture and see if you can find new meaning in it.
- **Try and see situations differently.** It is important to see things differently instead of always jumping to negative conclusions. For example, if you come home and loud music is playing you might think that someone is playing the music just to irritate you. If you didn't get angry and asked them to turn down the music so you could rest, they would probably say, "Sorry, I thought you were only coming home later". If you stop jumping to negative conclusions it will help you to feel less stressed and happier about life.
- **Be in the moment.** Many of us spend so much time thinking about the past or imagining the future that we miss out on fully experiencing what is going on right now. Make an effort to focus your attention on what you are doing right now and what is happening around you. Pay attention to what you can see, hear, smell and touch. Look around at the beauty of nature, smell the flowers, feel the sun on your skin and listen to the birds singing.
- **Play with children in your family or with a pet.** Playing in the garden with your dog or pet, reading a story to a child, rocking a baby to sleep etc. has a calming effect which allows you to feel better.
- **Do relaxation exercises.** It helps to imagine a balloon in your stomach and breathing in deeply and slowly until the balloon becomes bigger, then slowly breathing out to release the air from the balloon. Deep, slow, controlled breathing will help relieve stress and allow you to feel calmer and in control.
- **Take a warm bath.** Warm water is soothing and relaxing. You could also add baby oil, Rooibos tea, lavender leaves or bubble bath for added relaxation.
- **Smell something nice.** Many people find that certain smells help them feel good. Sometimes a simple flower or the smell of fresh baked bread will help you feel better and bring back good memories.
- **Listen to music.** If you enjoy music, make it a part of your everyday life. You could play soothing classical music or any other music that you enjoy. Singing or dancing along will instantly help improve your mood.
- **Make music.** Making music is also a good way to help you feel better. Beating on drums or even a table as well as other kinds of instruments are ways to relieve tension and increase good feelings.
- **Singing for the soul.** It fills your lungs with fresh air and improves your mood. Sing to yourself, wherever you feel comfortable and as loud as you would like. Sing along with your favourite music on the radio etc. Try singing your favourite songs from childhood, this will bring about good memories and feelings.

For more help, please call SADAG Trauma Helpline 0800 20 50 26 or visit the website www.sadag.org

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