

TWELVE STEPS TO POSITIVE CHANGE

When you are depressed, it can be hard to think of positive steps to take. You may feel that you lack enough energy to think of what to do differently. If you choose not to use antidepressants, however, you can still take certain steps to improve your mood. This section discusses the best steps that I know of—I used them on myself when I was depressed and they worked. I would recommend them to family and friends.

Even psychologists are not exempt from depression. Twenty-nine years ago, I went through a moderately severe major depression. I definitely experienced a seriously depressed mood. My physical symptoms included early morning awakening (arising early and not being able to fall back to sleep), irritability, appetite problems, fatigue, and difficulties concentrating. I often felt like I was wading through knee-deep tar with a lodestone on my back.

My depression evolved slowly. It was connected to major changes in my life and long work days. First, there were signs of an approaching storm. Then I felt swamped. I knew that it was important to deal with depression, and that it was important to take steps—even small steps—to counteract this process. Three thoughts helped:

1. Depression is time-limited.

2. Activity is a remedy for depression.

3. Depressive thinking is a state of mind, not a concrete reality.

I was not under any illusion that I could quickly fix myself, but I also knew that this was a condition that I could not afford to let fester. I recognized the signs of depression, so I knew what I was up against. I also had success helping others deal with their depressions. That knowledge and experience gave me a unique advantage. If I thought that the techniques I used were helpful with my clients, they were good enough to use on myself.

Fortunately I knew the cognitive signatures of depressive thoughts. The cognitive signatures of depression are thought patterns that commonly link with depression. They include helplessness and hopelessness thinking. Knowing that certain thoughts are normally present with depression made it simpler to accept their existence and to contest them. I repeatedly acted to defeat this depressive thinking when I caught the ideas weaving through my mind.

I admit that I was not always on top of this process. Nevertheless, by making a special effort to overcome depressive thoughts, I did myself considerable good and, I'm convinced, shortened the duration of my depression. Throughout this workbook, I'll share my thoughts with you on ways to go about this task.

The twelve steps I followed will normally apply, in one degree or other, to the different forms of depression. They're outlined below. These methods will be fleshed out in greater detail as you progress through the book.