



# Blue Healer News

Helping people manage and cope with depression, stress and anxiety.



NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief, Dubbo Ph: 02 6882 9222

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## The road to depression recovery

Recovering from depression requires action. But taking action when you're depressed is hard. In fact, just thinking about the things you should do to feel better, like exercising or going out with friends, can be exhausting.

It's the Catch-22 of depression recovery. The things that help the most are the things that are most difficult to do. But there's a difference between difficult and impossible.

### Start small and stay focused

The key to depression recovery is to start with a few small goals and slowly build from there. Draw upon whatever resources you have. You may not have much energy, but you probably have enough to take a short walk around the block or pick up the phone to call a loved one.

Take things day by day and reward yourself for each accomplishment. The steps may seem small, but if you make time for them each day, they'll quickly add up. And for all the energy you put in to your depression recovery, you'll get back much more in return.

### Depression Self-help Tip 1: Cultivate Supportive Relationships

Getting the support you need plays a big role in lifting the fog of depression and keeping it away. On your own, it can be difficult to maintain perspective and sustain the effort required to beat depression. But the very nature of depression makes it difficult to reach out for help. However, isolation and loneliness make depression even worse, so maintaining your close relationships and social activities are important.

The thought of reaching out to even close family members and friends can seem overwhelming. You may feel ashamed, too exhausted to talk, or guilty for neglecting the relationship. Remind yourself that this is the depression talking. Your loved ones care about you and want to help.

- **Turn to trusted friends and family members.** Share what you're going through with the people you love and trust. Ask for the help and support you need. You may have retreated from your most treasured relationships, but they can get you through this tough time.
- **Try to keep up with social activities even if you don't feel like it.** When you're depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell. But being around other people will make you feel less depressed.
- **Join a support group for depression.** Being with others who are dealing with depression can go a long way in reducing your sense of isolation. You can also encourage each other, give and receive advice on how to cope, and share your experiences.

# 10 tips for reaching out and building relationships.

1. Talk to one person about your feelings.
2. Help someone else by volunteering.
3. Have lunch or coffee with a friend.
4. Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly.
5. Accompany someone to the movies, a concert, or a small get-together.
6. Call or email an old friend.
7. Go for a walk with a workout buddy.
8. Schedule a weekly dinner date.
9. Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club.
10. Confide in a counselor, therapist or clergy member.

## Depression self-help tip 2:

### Take care of yourself

In order to overcome depression, you have to nurture yourself. This includes making time for things you enjoy, asking for help from others, setting limits on what you're able to do, adopting healthy habits, and scheduling fun activities into your day.

#### Do things you enjoy (or used to)

While you can't force yourself to have fun or experience pleasure, you can choose to do things that you used to enjoy. Pick up a former hobby or a sport you used to like. Express yourself creatively through music, art, or writing. Go out with friends. Take a day trip to a museum, the mountains, or the park.

#### Develop a wellness toolbox

Come up with a list of things that you can do for a quick mood boost. Include any strategies, activities, or skills that have helped in the past. The more "tools" for coping with depression, the better. Try and implement a few of these ideas each day, even if you're feeling good.



Push yourself to do things, even when you don't feel like it. You might be surprised at how much better you feel once you're out in the world. Even if your depression doesn't lift immediately, you'll gradually feel more upbeat and energetic as you make time for fun activities.

#### Adopt healthy lifestyle habits

- Aim for 8 hours of sleep. Depression typically involves sleep problems. Whether you're sleeping too little or too much, your mood suffers. Get on a better sleep schedule by learning healthy sleep habits.
- Expose yourself to a little sunlight every day. Lack of sunlight can make depression worse. Make sure you're getting enough. Take a short walk outdoors, have your coffee outside, enjoy an al fresco meal, people-watch on a park bench, or sit out in the garden.
- Practice relaxation techniques. A daily [relaxation practice](#) can help relieve symptoms of depression, reduce stress, and boost feelings of joy and well-being. Try yoga, deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation.

#### Fight depression by managing stress

Not only does stress prolong and worsen depression, but it can also trigger it. In order to get over depression and stay well, it's essential to learn how to minimize and cope with stress.

- Identify your stressors. Figure out all the things in your life that are stressing you out. Examples include: work overload, unsupportive relationships, substance abuse, taking on too much, or health problems. Once you've identified your stressors, you can make a plan to avoid them or minimize their impact.
- Go easy on yourself. Many depressed people are perfectionists, holding themselves to impossibly high standards and then beating themselves up when they fail to meet them. Battle this source of self-imposed stress by challenging your negative ways of thinking.
- Plan ahead. If you know your stress triggers and limits, you will be able to identify and avoid many landmines. If you sense trouble ahead, protect yourself by dipping into your wellness toolbox and saying "no" to added responsibility.

## Depression self-help tip 3:

### Get regular exercise

When you're depressed, exercising may be the last thing you feel like doing. But exercise is a powerful tool for dealing with depression. In fact, studies show that regular exercise can be as effective as antidepressant medication at increasing energy levels and decreasing feelings of fatigue.

Scientists haven't figured out exactly why exercise is such a potent antidepressant, but evidence suggests that physical activity increases mood-enhancing neurotransmitters in the brain, raises endorphins, reduces stress, and relieves muscle tension – all things that can have a positive effect on depression.

To get the most benefit, aim for 30 minutes of exercise per day. But you can start small. Short 10-minute bursts of activity can have a positive effect on your mood. Here are a few easy ways to get moving:

- Take the stairs rather than the elevator
- Park your car in the farthest spot in the lot
- Take your dog for a walk
- Pair up with an exercise partner
- Walk while you're talking on the phone
- As a next step, try incorporating walks or some other enjoyable, easy form of exercise into your daily routine. The key is to pick an activity you enjoy, so you're more likely to keep up with it.

### Exercise as an Antidepressant

The following exercise tips offer a powerful prescription for boosting mood:

- **Exercise now...and again.** A 10-minute walk can improve your mood for two hours. The key to sustaining mood benefits is to exercise regularly.
- **Choose activities that are moderately intense.** Aerobic exercise undoubtedly has mental health benefits, but you don't need to sweat strenuously to see results.
- **Find exercises that are continuous and rhythmic (rather than intermittent).** Walking, swimming, dancing, stationery biking, and yoga are good choices.
- **Add a mind-body element.** Activities such as yoga and tai chi rest your mind and pump up your energy. You can also add a meditative element to walking or swimming by repeating a mantra (a word or phrase) as you move.
- **Start slowly, and don't overdo it.** More isn't better. Athletes who over train find their moods drop rather than lift.

Adapted from Johns Hopkins Health Alerts

### Depression self-help tip 4:

#### Eat a healthy, mood-boosting diet

What you eat has a direct impact on the way you feel. Aim for a balanced diet of protein, complex carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables.

- Don't neglect breakfast. A solid breakfast provides energy for the day.
- Don't skip meals. Going too long between meals can make you feel irritable and tired, so aim to eat something at least every 3 -4 hours.
- Minimize sugar and refined carbs. You may crave sugary snacks, baked goods, or comfort foods such as pasta or french fries. But these "feel-good" foods quickly lead to a crash in mood and energy.
- Focus on complex carbohydrates. Foods such as baked potatoes, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, oatmeal, whole

grain breads, and bananas can boost serotonin levels without a crash.

- **Boost your B vitamins.** Deficiencies in B vitamins such as folic acid and B-12 can trigger depression. To get more, take a B-complex vitamin supplement or eat more citrus fruit, leafy greens, beans, chicken, and eggs.
- **Consider taking a chromium supplement** – Some depression studies show that chromium picolinate reduces carbohydrate cravings, eases mood swings, and boosts energy. Supplementing with chromium picolinate is especially effective for people who tend to overeat and oversleep when depressed. Aim for 600 mcg per day.
- **Practice mindful eating.** Slow down and pay attention to the full experience of eating. Enjoy the taste of your food

### Omega-3 fatty acids play an essential role in stabilizing mood.

- Foods rich in certain omega-3 fats called EPA and DHA can give your mood a big boost. The best sources are fatty fish such as salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, sardines, and some cold water fish oil supplements. Canned albacore tuna and lake trout can also be good sources depending on how the fish were raised and processed.
- You may hear a lot about getting your omega-3's from foods rich in ALA fatty acids. Main sources are vegetable oils and nuts (especially walnuts), flax, soybeans, and tofu. Be aware that our bodies generally convert very little ALA into EPA and DHA.
- Some people avoid seafood because they worry about mercury or other possible toxins. But most experts agree that the benefits of eating 2 servings a week of cold water fatty fish outweigh the risks.

### Depression self-help tip 5:

#### Challenge negative thinking

Depression puts a negative spin on everything, including the way you see yourself, the situations you encounter, and your expectations for the future.

But you can't break out of this pessimistic mind frame by "just thinking positive." Happy thoughts or wishful thinking won't cut it. Rather, the trick is to replace negative thoughts with more balanced thoughts.

#### Ways to challenge negative thinking:

- **Think outside yourself.** Ask yourself if you'd say what you're thinking about yourself to someone else. If not, stop being so hard on yourself. Think about less harsh statements that offer more realistic descriptions.
- **Keep a "negative thought log".** Whenever you experience a negative thought, jot down the thought and what triggered it in a notebook. Review your log when you're in a good mood. Consider if the negativity was truly warranted. For a second opinion, you can also ask a friend or therapist to go over your log with you.

# A Note From The Editor

**WELCOME** to the first edition of the Blue Healer News, the Blue Healers Depression Stress and Anxiety Program Newsletter. The Blue Healers Program is a psycho-educational program which aims to teach people ways of managing and coping with the symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety. Please see the Blue Healers Website [www.bluehealers.com.au](http://www.bluehealers.com.au) for more information and a location near you.

The Blue Healer News aims to offer information and self help strategies It will also inform you about the latest research findings and suggestions which may help in the treatment of depression, stress and anxiety.

The lead article in this issue gives examples of the many self help tips we can use to manage depression, stress and anxiety. Throughout 2010, the Blue Healer News will delve deeper into some of these strategies and offer some great self help advice.

I hope you enjoy this issue!



Trudy Hanson OAM  
Grief Counsellor & Educator  
Manager, NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo

- Replace negatives with positives. Review your negative thought log. Then, for each negative thought, write down something positive. For instance, "My boss hates me. She gave me this difficult report to complete" could be replaced with, "My boss must have a lot of faith in me to give me so much responsibility."
- Socialize with positive people. Notice how people who always look on the bright side deal with challenges, even minor ones, like not being able to find a parking space. Then consider how you would react in the same situation. Even if you have to pretend, try to adopt their optimism and persistence in the face of difficulty.

## Depression self-help tip 6:

### Raise your emotional intelligence

Emotions are powerful. They can override thoughts and profoundly influence behavior. But if you are emotionally intelligent, you can harness the power of your emotions.

Emotional intelligence isn't a safety net that protects you from life's tragedies, frustrations, or disappointments. We all go through disappointments, loss, and change. And while these are normal parts of life, they can still cause sadness, anxiety, and stress. But emotional intelligence gives you the ability to cope and bounce back from adversity, trauma, and loss. In other words, emotional intelligence makes you resilient.

Emotional intelligence gives you the ability to:

- Remain hopeful during challenging and difficult times
- Manage strong feelings and impulses
- Quickly rebound from frustration and disappointment
- Ask for and get support when needed
- Solve problems in positive, creative ways

## Learn how to raise your emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence gives you the tools for coping with difficult situations and maintaining a positive outlook. It helps you stay focused, flexible, and creative in bad times as well as good. The capacity to recognize your emotions and express them appropriately helps you avoid getting stuck in depression, anxiety, or other negative mood states.

## Depression self-help tip 7:

### Know when to get additional help

If you find your depression getting worse and worse, seek professional help. Needing additional help doesn't mean you're weak. Sometimes the negative thinking in depression can make you feel like you're a lost cause, but depression can be treated and you can feel better!

There are many effective treatment options for depression, your GP, and or counselor can give you more information about treatment as well as discuss medications. Don't forget about these self-help tips, though. Even if you're receiving professional help, these tips can be part of your treatment plan, speeding your recovery and preventing depression from returning.

Article adapted from: [http://helpguide.org/mental/depression\\_tips.htm](http://helpguide.org/mental/depression_tips.htm)

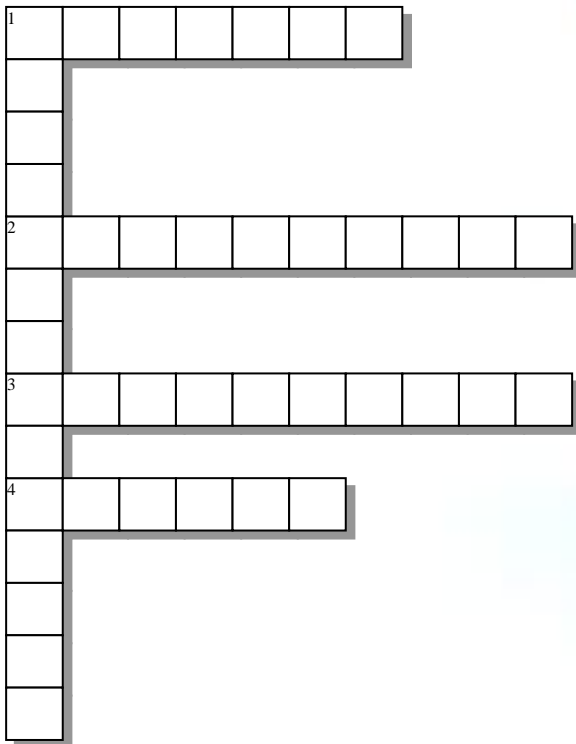


# Depression can be puzzling!

For many people experiencing depression, stress or anxiety boredom is one symptom which can lead to other problems such as alcohol/drug abuse, over eating and insomnia.

One coping strategy which you may find useful is to find something you enjoy that will allow your mind to focus on other things and reduce your anxiety levels. We recommend activities such as crosswords, find-a-words or Sudoku. You can take these to work with you so you can do them on a break or place them in areas around the home such as the kitchen to remind you that you can focus on other things when you are stressed and anxious. This is a great alternative to lower your anxiety rather than the use of alcohol, drugs or food in stressful situations. We have included a few puzzles for you here to try! Enjoy!

## Crossword



### Across:

- 1 - A mental disorder which presents with symptoms such as chest pain, rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, headaches and dizziness.
- 2 - A common mental illness suffered by 5% of Australians
- 3 - \_\_\_\_\_ can help you to better manage a range of problems including stress, tension, anxiety and depression.
- 4 - \_\_\_\_\_ is a psychological and physiological response to events that upset our personal balance in some way

### Down:

- 1 - Medication used to treat the symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety.

## Find A Word



behavioural  
exercise

cognitive  
therapy

diet

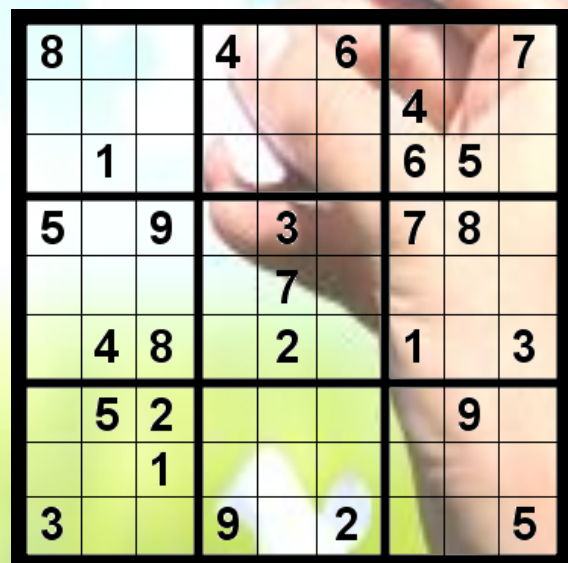
### Notes:

**Cognitive behavioural therapy** or CBT is a therapy based on changing your negative thoughts. Current research has shown that CBT can be an effective treatment for depression, stress and anxiety. CBT is an important element of the Blue Healers Depression program.

**Exercise** - research has shown that exercise is also an effective treatment for depression, stress and anxiety. Research has suggested that 30 - 45 minutes of low impact exercise such as stretching (yoga) walking and swimming can have a positive effect on mood.

**Diet** - your diet can have an effect on your mood. When you eat healthily you generally feel good. Research is showing that there is a link between diet and depression. Several dietary supplements are considered important to mental functionality.

## Sudoku



### How to Play

The rules of Sudoku are super simple. Every digit from 1 to 9 must appear:

- In each of the nine vertical columns,
- in each of the nine horizontal rows,
- and in each of the nine boxes

# For Your Diary

## Blue Healers Program - Dubbo

**When:** Tuesday, 9th February 2010 and then every Tuesday for 6 weeks.

**Where:** NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief  
Welchman Street, Dubbo

**Time:** 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm

**Cost:** FREE to suitable participants. A light supper will also be included.

**Register:**

To register for the Blue Healers Program in Dubbo please contact the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief on 02 6882 9222 and make an appointment for an assessment.

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## Blue Healers Program - Coffs Harbour

**When:** Wednesday 17th February 2010 and then every Wednesday for 6 weeks.

**Where:** Women's Health Centre  
74 Victoria Street, Coffs Harbour

**Time:** 6.00 pm - 8.00 pm

**Cost:** FREE to suitable participants. A light supper will also be included.

**Register:**

To register for the Blue Healers Program in Coffs Harbour please contact the NALAG Coffs Coast on 02 66483675 and make an appointment for an assessment.

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**WAIVER**

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## What is the Blue Healers Program?

The Blue Healers Depression, Stress and Anxiety Program is about managing and learning strategies for coping with depression, stress and anxiety. The Blue Healers Program is based on evidence-informed research and targets people who are experiencing mild to moderate depression, anxiety, and stress. The Program is a psycho-educational Program and not counselling.

The Blue Healers Program is **suitable** for adults with depression:

- Stress
- Anxiety

The Blue Healers Program is **unsuitable** for people with:

- Severe Clinical Depression
- Chronic Mental Illness

The Blue Healers Program has been developed by the NALAG Centre for Loss & Grief Dubbo and is conducted by NALAG Branches and Centres throughout New South Wales.

The Blue Healers Program is run in a group setting over 6 sessions (1 x 2 hour session per week for 6 weeks. During the program participants will learn about the evidence-informed strategies that may assist in managing depression, stress and anxiety. Topics to be covered include, sleep, diet, exercise, relaxation, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), problem solving and self esteem.

The Program is facilitated by a trained Facilitator who has completed the Blue Healers Facilitation Course. The course is supervised by a registered psychologist.

Each session of the Program involves 45 minutes of education, followed by a meal (usually dinner - which is provided) and then another 45 minutes of education and discussion.

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