

**Beyond Prozac:  
A Holistic Recovery Program for the  
Treatment of Depression, Anxiety  
and Bipolar Disorder**

**by Douglas Bloch, M.A.**

**author of  
*Healing From Depression: 12 Weeks to a Better Mood***



**[dbloch@teleport.com](mailto:dbloch@teleport.com)  
[www.healingfromdepression.com](http://www.healingfromdepression.com)**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
Chapter One	
Step 1 of The Better Mood Recovery Program: Setting the Intention to Heal.....	6
Chapter Two	
Step 2 of The Better Mood Recovery Program: Reaching Out for Support .....	10
Chapter Three	
Step 3 of The Better Mood Recovery Program: Treat Your Symptoms Using a Combination of Mutually Supportive Therapies .....	16
Chapter 4	
Putting This Program Into Practice: Seven Steps to Mental Health Recovery .....	38
The Better Mood Recovery Journal .....	40
Chapter 5	
Final Thoughts .....	46
Resources For Wellness .....	49

## INTRODUCTION

*“To optimize the function of the healing system, you must do everything in your power to improve physical health, mental/emotional health, and spiritual health...One of the disappointments of my professional life is meeting so few teachers who see the whole picture of health, who understand the importance of working on all fronts.”*

*Andrew Weil, M.D., Eight Weeks to Optimal Health*

If you have purchased this e-book, it is no doubt because either you or someone you love is in pain. I understand that pain. I know what it is like to feel the despair, the torment, the hopelessness of major depression. Over the past three decades I have had four major depressive episodes and have been hospitalized four times. I have experienced depression and have survived. My message is that you can survive, too.

Although the material I present focuses on healing from depression, anxiety or manic depression, I believe that many of the principles I will share can be applied to anyone who is undergoing a “dark night of the soul” experience. I define this as “relentless emotional or physical pain that appears to have no end.” It is my deepest wish that the lessons I learned from my suffering and the information contained in this book may give you the hope and inspiration to fight on in your darkest hours.

### Who This Program is For

In seeking a way to heal from my depression, I have developed a “better mood” recovery program that employs a “holistic,” multi-modal approach to enhance one’s mood. This program is primarily meant to serve:

- 1) Those individuals who have *previously experienced* one or more episodes of **major depression** and wish to stay well and avoid a relapse.
- 2) Those individuals who suffer from **dysthymia** (low-grade chronic depression) and desire to elevate their mood, as well as prevent a major depressive episode.
- 3) Those people who are *currently experiencing* a **major depressive episode** and wish to use these strategies as an adjunct to medication and /or psychotherapy.

I want to emphasize that my program **is meant to support, not replace, any medical treatment that you may be receiving.** Hence, if you are severely depressed it is essential that you continue to see a psychiatrist (or medication prescriber) as well as a counselor. If you are not working with a mental health professional, I will be sharing with you how to find one.

## An Overview of the Program

As the name implies, the better mood recovery program is designed to improve your overall mood. This course will not necessarily remove all of your symptoms and effect a total cure. Recovering from depression and anxiety is an ongoing process. What you will gain from the program is *a set of tools and strategies* that you can use to manage your symptoms and stay well.

This program is based on three essential interconnected steps. They are:

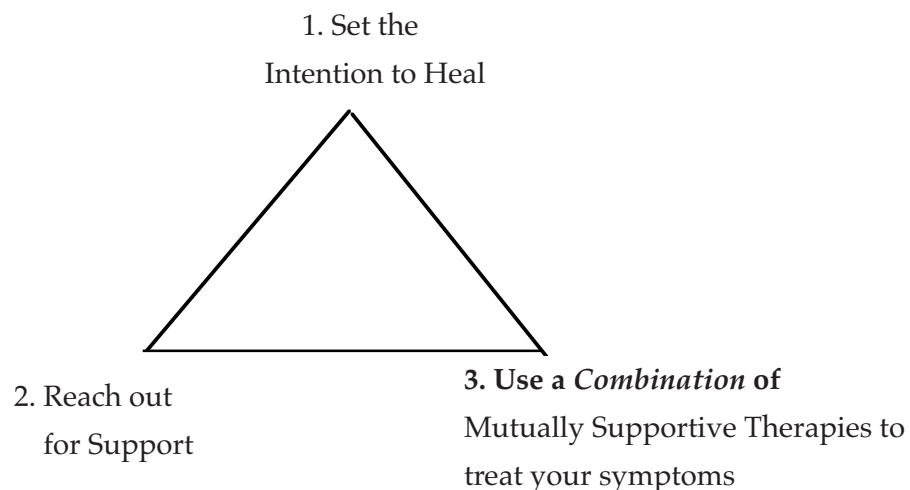
**Step 1: Set the intention to heal.** Make the decision that you want to get well, even if you don't know how. Setting the intention to heal is the starting point of all recovery.

**Step 2: Reach out for support.** Healing from depression and other mood disorders cannot occur in isolation. The love and support of other beings are essential for the healing process to occur.

**Step 3: Treat your symptoms using a combination of mutually supportive therapies.**

There is no one pill or cure for depression. There are, however, a number of self-care strategies that when used *together* create a synergistic, healing effect.

### The Three Steps of the Better Mood Recovery Program



“Intention + Support + Tools = Mental Health Recovery”

Over the past three years, I have worked with hundreds of individuals who have suffered from mild to severe anxiety and depression. In every instance people who practiced these three principles report that their mental health has improved.

### **The “Better Mood Recovery Journal”**

A central part of working this program will involve your creating a “better mood recovery journal.” Throughout this e-book you will receive simple assignments to complete and place in this notebook/journal. Having a record of where you’ve been and what you’ve done will give you a more realistic sense of your progress and help you to mark the positive changes you are making

To begin, acquire a three ring notebook and some loose notebook paper (you can choose lined or unlined). Your journal will be divided into five sections. I have found it helpful to use the three-hole tab dividers which you can purchase at any office supply store. Here are the five sections:

- **Section 1** will be for your vision statement and/or collage of wellness, as described in Chapter 1.
- **Section 2** is where you will keep track of your support network, as described in Chapter 2.
- **Section 3** is your daily journal in which you will track your mood, medications (if any) and self-care activities, as described in Chapter 3.
- **Section 4** is where you will write your affirmations and keep a gratitude journal.
- **Section 5** will be used to record and track your weekly goals.

In addition, you may choose to three-hole punch this e-book and place it at the beginning or end of your recovery journal so that you can have easy access to the information.

Now let’s explore this program in more detail.

## CHAPTER ONE

### STEP 1 OF THE BETTER MOOD RECOVERY PROGRAM: SETTING THE INTENTION TO HEAL

The Taoist philosopher Lao Tsu once said, “The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Today, you are setting out on a journey of healing from anxiety and depression. What is your first step as you begin this quest? It is simply to state your intention to get well.

This may seem like a simple act, but it has profound ramifications for your future health and well being. By setting the intention to heal you will stimulate and support your body’s “healing system”—its innate capacity to restore wellness and bring itself back into balance. It doesn’t matter how long you have suffered from anxiety or depression. You don’t have to know *how* your healing will take place. You don’t even have to *believe* that it is possible. Just ask yourself, “*Is there a part of me, even if it is ten percent or one percent, that wants to feel better?*” If you can find just a molecule within you that says, “I WANT TO LIVE,” your healing journey will have begun.

By setting the intention to heal you will stimulate and support your body’s “healing system”—its innate capacity to control disease and bring itself back into balance. Physician Andrew Weil describes this phenomenon in the book *Spontaneous Healing*. Weil writes:

The body can heal itself. It can do so because it has a healing system. At every level of biological organization, from DNA up, mechanisms of self-diagnosis, self-repair, and regeneration exist in us. Medicine that takes advantage of this innate healing is more effective than medicine that simply suppresses symptoms.

Although we call depression a “mental illness,” the disorder is caused by physical imbalances in the brain. Saying “I want to feel better,” is the first step in changing your brain chemistry.

Intention is not like wishful thinking. It is not abstract, vague and passive. Like an arrow flying toward a target, intention is clear, specific, and has the power of commitment behind it. It is this one-pointed commitment which activates a benevolent aspect of the universe that will support you in realizing your desire to be well.

Once again, I wish to emphasize that I am not asking you to do anything, only to get in touch with your desire to be well. If you don't believe that healing is attainable, be open to the possibility. Be willing to be healed.

For example, during my most recent episode of major depression, I thought that my chances of surviving were close to zero. But just as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* never lost sight of her desire to return to Kansas, I continued to say to the universe, "Heal me from my affliction. Please release me from this pain." Eventually, the higher powers responded to my request and delivered me from the abyss.

### **Your Vision of Wellness**

The first tool that you will be using to translate your intention to heal into a reality is the vision statement. Essentially, your vision statement answers the question, "**What would my life look and feel like if I were free from the symptoms of anxiety and depression?**"

The idea of a vision statement is derived from the second habit from Steven Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*—"begin with the end in mind." According to Covey, this habit arises from the principle that "all things are created twice," first in the mind and then in the world of form. In writing a vision statement, you create a mental blueprint or picture of health that you seek to bring into your life. Over time, this "mental picture" of the good you desire will manifest in outer reality.

### **Composing a Vision Statement**

Here is a process for composing a vision statement. Imagine for a moment that you are in a state of health and wholeness. Imagine that your mental and emotional health were functioning at optimal levels. Use the following questions to help you compose your vision statement.

- If you were in a better mood, how would your body look and feel?
- How much energy would you have?
- How would you be feeling most of the time?
- What types of thoughts would you be thinking?
- What types of relationships would you have?
- What kind of work would you be involved in?
- What would your spiritual life be like?

Drawing upon the answers to the above questions, write a **paragraph (or more)** describing your vision of mental and emotional health. Write this in **Section 1** of your better mood recovery journal (see pg. 41 of this e-book).

See if you can use all five senses—sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste—to depict your experience. Set it down in the present tense, as if the experience were happening now.

As you proceed with this exercise, do your best to write something, even if recovery from depression seems like a distant reality. If you can't imagine yourself being completely well, choose to see yourself feeling "a little bit better." One woman simply wrote, "I just want to feel my life force again."

Remember, I am not asking you to believe in your healing; only to desire it. If this still seems like too much, ask someone to help you write your vision statement—e.g., a friend, family member, your counselor, your doctor, etc. *You don't have to do this work alone.* Here is a sample vision statement, written by one of my clients.

### **Michael's Vision of Health and Wellness**

I am calm and peaceful. My energy is strong and good, I am engaged in life with my family, friends and co-workers. I am happy and easy going. I sleep well and peacefully at night. I wake up in the morning looking forward to my day, whether it is new design challenges at work or weekends where nothing is planned. I look forward to being with and doing things with my friends and family. I travel extensively and I love it. I am a body builder enjoying my great body and my workouts.

I am a good influence on my kids, and they look to me for advice and support which I easily and positively give. I love my life.

Once you have written your vision statement of wellness, it is important that you read it on a daily basis in order to benefit from the principle of learning through repetition. You may also wish to set aside a specific time each day to focus on your vision statement, such as upon awakening or before bedtime. I find that these are the times when my mind is most receptive to the power of suggestion

Be consistent when using your vision statement. It takes time for new patterns to be formed in the brain. When you repeat your vision statement, you impress its thought pattern on your mind, thereby transforming your previously held mental patterns. The more you use your vision statement, the more rapid and powerful the healing will be. Soon its words will become a living presence in your awareness.

### Creating a Collage for Healing

If you feel more comfortable with pictures than with words, you might consider gathering some old magazines and creating your own wellness collage. After all, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” The collage below was created by cutting and pasting images from magazines. It gives a pictorial representation of someone’s vision of wellness.



Or, if you are artistically inclined, you may want to draw or paint your picture of wellness. The book, *Life, Paint and Passion* by Michelle Cachou, can help you to access important healing images through painting, especially if you have no drawing experience.

Holding an image of wellness is simple in theory, but more difficult to practice. This is because depression often robs us of the hope that healing is possible. This leads us to the second step in our recovery program—reach out for support.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STEP 2 OF THE BETTER MOOD RECOVERY PROGRAM: REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT

*“Anything that promotes a sense of isolation often leads to illness and suffering.*

*Anything that promotes a sense of intimacy,  
connection and community, is healing.”*

*Dean Ornish, “Love and Survival*

You have just learned that setting the intention to heal represents the first step on the road to recovery. Now I would like to share an equally important principle: **the power of intention is magnified when it is shared with another person.** When you state your vision of wellness in the presence of one or more supportive people, that vision becomes strengthened and exponentially magnified.

In addition, other people **can hold your vision of healing for you, even when you cannot!** They can look at your vision of wellness with full belief, without being burdened by the baggage of fear and doubt. This was precisely what occurred in my life when a group of twelve loving individuals came together and held a collective vision of my healing. They did this by reading my vision statement every day for 30 days while visualizing me as whole and well. Although I was totally convinced that I could not recover, my support team **knew** in their hearts that I would get well. Eventually the power of their conviction became my reality.

My experience is not an isolated case. Since my recovery, I have worked as a midwife to help others emerge from episodes of anxiety and depression. In each case, the individual’s recovery would not have been possible without the loving support of one or more people. This principle of mutual support has also been demonstrated by the success of Alcoholics Anonymous. No cure existed for alcoholism until two drunks came together and said, “Let’s do together what neither of us can do alone.” Each day, tens of millions of people gather together in AA and other 12-step communities to mutually support each other’s healing.

Having support in your life is not just helpful in promoting recovery; it is essential. Having healthy relationships helps to alleviate depression and to prevent its recurrence. Isolation, on the other hand, makes one more vulnerable to mental and physical illness.

One cannot overcome an illness like major depression (or any dark night of the soul experience) by oneself. The weight of the illness is too immense, even for the strongest willed individual to bear alone. Whenever I see people withdraw, isolate, or try to “beat the illness on their own” their symptoms invariably worsen. Conversely, when people take the risk and reach out for help, they open themselves to a healing force more potent than any known drug. As Dean Ornish writes, referring to the healing power of human connection:

“I am not aware of any other factor in medicine—not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery—that has a greater impact on our quality of life or incidence of illness.”

### Finding Allies in Healing

Step two of the better mood recovery program involves building a “support team,” a group of professionals, family and friends who can walk you through your episode of depression and anxiety.

Building a good support network takes time and the process is unique to each person. It means surrounding yourself with people who can validate what you are going through and who can unconditionally accept you. Some of the members of a support system may include:

- **family** and close **friends**.
- an **ally** such as a counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist, rabbi, minister, priest, 12 step sponsor or friend in whom you can confide.
- **group support**. Here is where you can gain (and give) help and encouragement from others who are going through experiences like yours. In a support group, you learn that you are not alone in your suffering, and that there are others who truly understand your pain. To find a depression or anxiety support group in your area, call your local mental health clinic, hospital, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (800-950-NAMI), The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (800-326-3632) or the Depressive and Related Affective Disorder Association (410-955-4647).

Other types of group support you may wish to seek out include a 12-step groups, women’s groups, men’s groups, group therapy, or any a self-help group that focuses on a challenge in your life.

In addition to the support of human beings, we can receive healing from our animal friends, especially **domestic pets**. The unconditional love that we receive from these beings can be as healing as human love. (This is why pets are increasingly brought to hospital wards and nursing homes.) A loving relationship with a cherished pet provides bonding and intimacy that can strengthen one's psychological immune system and help keep depression at bay.

### Overcoming Blocks to Support

Although having social support is vital for good mental health, if you are like many people suffering from depression, you may find it difficult to reach out. Reasons may include:

- natural shyness.
- not feeling deserving. (Why would anyone want to support a wretch like me?)
- fear of being rejected or ridiculed.
- hopelessness—it won't matter anyway.
- shame—feeling embarrassed about asking for help.

Feelings of unworthiness and the fear of rejection often lie at the root of many depressed people's social phobia. Both of these can be overcome through counseling, and in some cases medication. Try saying the affirmation, "*I am a lovable person who is worthy of support, attention, respect and love.*" If your immediate response is, "No, I'm not!" you may want to explore the source of that belief. You'll probably find that it is rooted in the early childhood experience of not feeling unconditionally loved. This universal wound can be healed by creating "new imprints," either with your therapist or another loving presence.

In addition, please consider the following:

- You are worthy of receiving support. The universe longs to help you in your time of need.
- If you are afraid of being a burden, realize that most people *enjoy* being of support. The act of giving is its own reward.

Remember, not only is it okay to reach out for support, it is a vital step in the recovery process. Asking for help *will* make a real difference.

### **Creating Your Support Team**

Take a moment and see if you can think of two to three people who might be part of your support team. These individuals can be friends, family members, clergy, or someone like yourself who is wanting to heal from anxiety or depression.

Each member of your support team should:

- be available in person, by phone, or by email at least once a week.
- be a good listener—i.e., be able to listen without judging or jumping in to fix the problem
- be comfortable with intense feelings.
- be totally committed to the goal of your recovery.
- validate your feelings (not talk you out of them).
- provide feedback and engage in problem solving when it is requested.
- share what has worked for them.
- be both compassionate and firm, as he/she holds you accountable to your goals and commitments.

Write the names of these people in **Section 2** of your better mood recovery journal.

Over the next week, I would like you to call or email these people and ask them if they could be a support person for you. When you speak to each person, you can do the following:

- 1) Ask if they are willing to be a supporter. Tell them what you need from the relationship.
- 2) Say that you are willing to be their supporter so that it is clear that the relationship is a two-way street.
- 3) Assure them that you have other people in your support network so that they will not have to be available for support at all times.

Note in your recovery journal when the contacts were made and the responses you received.

### **Locating A Mental Health Professional**

Two very important people that you may want to have as part of your support team are a counselor/therapist and/or a doctor or nurse practitioner who can prescribe psychiatric medication. There exist a great many qualified and compassionate health care professionals who offer care and treatment for depression. They include:

- psychiatrists
- clinical psychologists
- clinical social workers
- psychiatric nurse practitioners
- family practice physicians and internists
- marriage and family counselors
- pastoral counselors
- clergy
- drug and alcohol counselors

Although only psychiatrists, physicians and nurse practitioners can prescribe medication, members of the other groups offer psychotherapy and often “refer out” for the medication component. Thus, you may end up seeing a medical doctor for your medication and another professional for therapy. There are several ways to obtain these referrals:

### **1) Word of mouth**

Ask people you know (family, coworkers, friends, a family physician or internist) if they know of anyone who has been helpful to them or others.

### **2) State licensing boards**

You can call and ask for referrals. Feel free to ask about a practitioner’s credentials, how long he or she has been in practice, and his or her experience in treating depression.

### **3) Associations of helping professionals**

You can contact trade organizations such as the American Psychiatric Association: (202) 682-6220, the American Psychological Association: (202) 336-5800, and the National Association of Social Workers: (800) 638-8799 for referrals to mental health professionals in your area. You can also call local mental health organizations.

The relationship between doctor and patient, or therapist and client, plays a critical role in the healing process. Locating the right therapist means finding the right fit, just as in a marriage or business partnership. Take the time you need and trust your instincts. The person you work with will be an indispensable part of your healing journey.

In this respect, it is a good idea to interview several therapists before you make a final decision about the person who will be your guide and advocate. It is also okay to take time with a therapist before you decide if you want to continue with that person. At the very least you should feel safe, respected and understood by your counselor. The therapist should also be willing to explain his or her therapeutic philosophy and why he or she is using specific techniques.

Once you locate a counselor and/or prescriber for medication, write their names in **Section 2** of your better mood recovery journal (pg. 16). You may also want to write any thoughts, feelings or observations you have about these professionals and how they might serve as allies on your healing journey.

## CHAPTER THREE

### STEP 3 OF THE BETTER MOOD RECOVERY PROGRAM: TREAT YOUR SYMPTOMS USING A COMBINATION OF MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE THERAPIES

You have reached an important juncture in your journey in healing from depression. You have begun setting the intention to heal and reaching out for support. It is time to directly address your symptoms. But how?

The key to treating depression successfully is to approach it from a multitude of directions and modalities. An example of this integrative approach can be seen in the way doctors treat heart disease. If you go to a cardiologist and want to know how to prevent a heart attack (or to recover from one), he or she might prescribe a cholesterol-lowering medication and tell you to eat a low-fat diet, exercise three to four times a week, and cut down on the stress in your life.

In a similar manner, depression and other mood disorders can be treated holistically—i.e., on a variety of levels. I have identified five such levels of therapeutic self care—physical self-care, mental/emotional self-care, social support, spiritual connection, and lifestyle habits. The diagram on the following page gives a visual overview of these self-care strategies. Let's explore them in detail.

#### **Therapeutic Area #1: Physical Self-Care**

*"Our body is precious. It is our vehicle for awakening. Treat it with care."*

Buddha

Although depression is characterized as a mood disorder, it primarily affects the physical body. Those of who have suffered from clinical depression know the agonizing physical symptoms—change in appetite (eating too little or too much), disruption of sleep, the inability to experience pleasure, fatigue, lethargy, heaviness, agitation etc. In many ways, being depressed is like having the emotional flu. Conversely when we feel great physically—full of vitality, energetic, awake, alert, etc.—it is almost impossible to be in a bad mood. As a friend who suffers from anxiety is fond of saying, "It is so much easier to think positively and be calm and serene after a good night's sleep!"

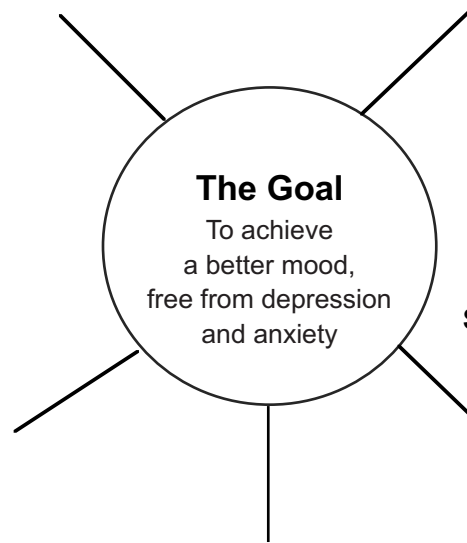
## Healing From Depression and Anxiety: Five Areas of Therapeutic Self-Care

### Physical self-care

- Exercise
- Nutrition
- Water intake
- Hydrotherapy
- Natural light
- Sleep
- Touch
- Breathing
- Yoga
- Medication
- Supplements
- Alternative therapies

### Lifestyle habits

- Structure/routine
- Time in nature
- Relaxation
- Setting goals
- Fulfilling work
- Pleasurable activities
- Creative self-expression
- Music
- Stress management
- Time for beauty
- A day of rest/being



### Spiritual connection

- Prayer
- Meditation
- Finding purpose and meaning
- Forgiveness
- Gratitude
- The primacy of spirit

### Social support

- Family
- Friends
- Psychiatrist/therapist
- Minister/rabbi
- Support groups
- Pets and animal friends
- Day treatment
- Community service

### Mental/Emotional self-care

- Cognitive therapy
- Releasing negative beliefs
- Taming the inner critic
- Affirmations and visualization
- A library of positive memories
- Mood journal
- Humor
- Self acceptance: releasing the stigma
- Family of origin healing
- Working through grief

Because of this body-mood connection, I believe that physical self-care is essential to heal from depression and anxiety. Here are some ways you can create a better mood by nurturing your physical body.

### 1) Exercise

Exercise—any physical activity that promotes endurance, flexibility or strengthening—is a natural antidepressant. The latest scientific research demonstrates that as little as three hours a week of regular exercise reduces the symptoms of mild to moderate depression as effectively as Prozac and other medications. Aerobic exercise, in particular, improves circulation, brings increased blood flow and oxygen to the brain, and releases endorphins, the body’s natural mood lifting chemicals. The only “side effects” of aerobic exercise are a stronger cardiovascular system and better overall health. Even if you have no history of mood disorders, regular exercise can profoundly improve the quality of your physical, mental and emotional well being.

Regular exercise has become the central pillar of my recovery program. On weekdays, I ride my stationary bike and lift weights in the morning and swim in the evening. On weekends I take long walks in the forest. When I miss my routines for even one or two days, I am more likely to become depressed or anxious. When I return to my schedule, the self-doubts, fears, and anxieties melt away.

One of the reasons that many people resist exercise is that they see it as something arduous and unpleasant. To heal this resistance, see if you can turn the “e” in exercise to “e” in enjoy. In other words, strive to make exercise fun by connecting it to activities that give you pleasure. Such activities might include:

- gardening
- hiking in nature
- dancing
- yoga
- planned active activities with friends. (Note that the word activities has “active” in it. Instead of going out with a friend to your favorite French restaurant, enjoy a hike on one of your favorite nature trails.)

Another way to approach exercise is to incorporate it into your daily activities. (Our agrarian ancestors didn’t need to set aside special times in their busy schedules to work out at the gym.) Some mundane activities that will give you a natural workout include:

- doing the laundry.
- walking up the stairs in your office building.
- walking to the grocery store.
- pruning roses.
- edging the lawn.
- pulling out weeds.
- planting and harvesting veggies.

Our bodies were made to move. Whether it is a daily walk in the park, a water aerobics or yoga class, or dancing to your favorite music, get into motion. Start with small steps and remind yourself that you don't have to be perfect. At the pool where I swim, I see many disabled, elderly and overweight people taking part in water exercise classes. Even if you have a physical disability or carry extra pounds, it is usually possible to engage in some form of movement.

## **2) Diet and nutrition**

Good nutrition supports the optimal functioning of your brain and body. To insure that you are meeting your nutritional needs, eat a balanced diet of healthy foods. Eating as much organic produce as possible will help to minimize the intake of chemicals and preservatives which can cause problems in sensitive individuals.

Another part of nutritional self-care is cutting back on the sweets. Studies have shown that too much sugar can foster anxiety as well as depression. Reducing intake of sugar may also bolster your immune system, reduce allergies and cut the risk of diabetes.

Finally, there seems to be a loose connection between depression and food sensitivities. Although no one has proven that these sensitivities can cause depression, some clients report that certain foods aggravate their depressive conditions. You may want to monitor your dietary intake to see if there are foods that bring about adverse reactions.

## **3) Vitamin and mineral supplementation**

In addition to eating a balanced diet, you might want to take a good multi-vitamin and multi-mineral supplement with special emphasis on the antioxidants—vitamins A, C and E. The entire vitamin B complex is known to maintain and promote normal mental functioning. Calcium and magnesium, which help to calm the nervous system, are especially helpful for anxiety-prone individuals. Deficiencies of the B vitamins, as well as of magnesium, manganese, zinc and iron, can be a factor in depression.

#### 4) Maintaining adequate water intake

To maintain healthy body functioning, it is important to drink at least two quarts of fluids a day (Do not count coffee as part of your fluid intake since it is dehydrating.) Your body is composed of 70 percent water while the brain is about 90 percent water. Water is essential to proper metabolism, circulation and elimination. It flushes out toxins and restores chemical balance to cells, tissues and organs. Many of my clients have reported a direct improvement in mood, as well a cessation of physical symptoms such as headaches, once they increased their fluid intake.

Your thirst reflex is not a good indicator of dehydration; by the time you feel thirsty you should have been drinking water hours ago. This is why many people are chronically dehydrated and don't even know it. A mere 2% drop in water can trigger fuzzy short term memory, trouble with basic math, or difficulty reading. For many people, the thirst mechanism is often mistaken for hunger. A University of Washington study showed that one glass of water eliminate midnight hunger pangs for almost 100% of dieters.

#### 5) Exposure to natural light

Another physical need of the human body is getting enough exposure to natural light. For those people who are light-sensitive, inadequate exposure to light can create depressive syndromes such as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). If you live in a dark climate and suffer from SAD, use full-spectrum lights to enhance your exposure to light. (I use halogen lamps because I prefer the warmer, yellow color.) An hour of exposure to outdoor light in the early morning can also make a difference. Some people find that lighting candles on a dark winter's day brings warmth and coziness to the otherwise dreary environment.

#### 6) Sleep hygiene

Part of staying physically balanced means developing regular sleep patterns that give you adequate amounts of rest. (Studies show that most Americans are sleep-deprived.) Sleep irregularities are among the early warning signs of *both* mania and depression. These symptoms include:

- trouble falling asleep.
- trouble staying asleep.
- early morning awakenings (followed by ruminations).
- sleeping too much.

Sleep medication can be useful in trying to break a pattern of sleeplessness, but it is only designed for short-term use. Behavioral changes, such as those listed in the book *No*

*More Sleepless Nights* by Peter Hauri, can be extremely effective. These include:

- Developing a sleep schedule—a regular time of going to sleep and arising—and sticking to it.
- Reducing caffeine and alcohol; eliminating cigarettes.
- Using the bed only for sleep and sex, not for other activities such as reading.
- Practicing bedtime relaxation techniques.
- Getting regular exercise during the day.

In addition, you may wish to be evaluated at a sleep clinic to rule out sleep apnea and other physiological causes of sleep disorder.

## 7) Medication

If antidepressant medication is part of your treatment plan, it is important to take it as prescribed. Medication is not a miracle cure or a replacement for psychotherapy. Medication can create an inner stability (“take the edge off,” as a friend described it) that will allow you to make use of therapy. Some people need to take antidepressants on a long-term basis, while others are able to stop the medication after their depression lifts. Consult your medication prescriber to determine the plan that is right for you.

Current theory links the biochemical causes of mood disorders to a deficiency of three of the brain’s neurotransmitters—serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine. Antidepressants don’t actually create more serotonin, norepinephrine and dopamine. Instead, they are believed to limit the reabsorption of these chemicals into the brain’s nerve cells, thereby increasing the amounts of neurotransmitters available in the space (synapse) between the sending and receiving cells. This in turn causes a better neural transmission from cell to cell, resulting in an elevation of mood.

For those people who cannot tolerate antidepressants or for whom they simply do not work, there are other “natural medications” you can try. These include, St. John’s Wort and the amino acids 5-Hydroxy-Tryptophan (5-HTP), L-tyrosine and S-Adenosyl-Methionine (SAM). Because even “natural” substances can produce strong reactions in sensitive individuals, anyone taking these remedies should do so under the supervision of a nutritionally oriented physician (psychiatrist, family doctor, chiropractor, naturopath, etc.).

I recommend that you keep a daily record of medications and remedies in **Section 3** of your recovery journal. This will provide a history of what was effective, when it was effective and what did not work.

To help you identify and research your medication, the table below lists the most commonly prescribed drugs for depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety by their generic (chemical) names and trade (brand) names. If your medication's trade name does not appear, look it up by its generic name, or ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information. You can also type the name in your favorite Internet search engine.

---



---

### Alphabetical Listing of Medications by Trade Name

#### Antidepressant medications

<i>Trade name</i>	<i>Chemical or generic name</i>
Adapin	doxepin
Anafranil	clomipramine
Asendin	amoxapine
Aventyl	nortriptyline
Celexa	citalopram
Desyrel	trazodone
Effexor	venlafaxine
Elavil	amitriptyline
Lexapro	escitalopram
Ludiomil	maprotiline
Luvox	fluvoxamine
Marplan	isocarboxazid
Nardil	phenelzine
Norpramin	desipramine
Pamelor	nortriptyline
Parnate	tranylcypromine
Paxil	paroxetine
Pertofrane	desipramine
Remeron	mirtazapine
Prozac	fluoxetine
Serzone	nefazodone
Sinequan	doxepin
Surmontil	trimipramine
Tofranil	imipramine
Vivactil	protriptyline
Wellbutrin	bupropion
Zoloft	sertraline

#### Antimanic medications

<i>Trade Name</i>	<i>Chemical or generic name</i>
Cibalith-S	lithium citrate
Depakote	divalproex sodium
Eskalith	lithium carbonate
Lithobid	lithium carbonate
Tegretol	carbamazepine
Topamax	topiramate

#### Antianxiety medications

<i>Trade name</i>	<i>Chemical or generic name</i>
Ativan	lorazepam
BuSpar	buspirone
Klonopin	clonazepam
Librium	chlordiazepoxide
Paxipam	halazepam
Serax	oxazepam
Tranxene	clorazepate
Valium	diazepam
Xanax	alprazolam

#### Antipsychotic medications

<i>Trade name</i>	<i>Chemical or generic name</i>
Abilify	aripiprazole
Geodon	ziprasidone
Respirdal	respiridone
Seroquel	quetiapine
Zyprexa	olanzapine

---



---

## 8) Abdominal breathing

One of the most powerful ways to impact the emotions and the involuntary nervous system is through the breath. In Sanskrit, the word for breath is *prana*, which also means “life” or “spirit.” Most people in our society breathe rapidly and shallowly, using only the upper part of their chests. This is especially true for depressed individuals, whose life force is at a low point.

Abdominal breathing (also called diaphragmatic breathing) involves using your entire chest *and* abdominal cavity to breathe. Through abdominal breathing, you can slow down racing thoughts and increase the body’s life force and vitality. I first learned about abdominal breathing in a yoga class many years ago. You can also learn diaphragmatic breathing techniques in any stress reduction clinic, biofeedback center, pain clinic, or from any individual who has practiced yoga.

## 9) Physical touch

Human touch is profoundly healing for body, mind and spirit. Phrases such as “you touched me” or “keep in touch” reflect the importance of human touch to emotional and physical health. There are many ways of experiencing touch—by extending a hug, holding a hand, or giving a back rub.

One way to receive healing touch is through therapeutic massage. Massage relaxes the muscles, promotes lymph drainage and stimulates the immune system. While many people are “touch hungry,” those folks who have experienced physical violence or sexual abuse may need to be “desensitized” to their negative conditioning around touch before they feel safe and open to its healing benefits. If you think this may be true for you, consult with your therapist or someone who specializes in treating survivors of physical/sexual trauma.

## 10) Treating underlying metabolic and endocrine disorders

Finally, untreated endocrine problems of all sorts are recognized as having the potential to cause mood difficulties. The most common of these is depression caused by hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid), which can be successfully treated using thyroid medication. Other medical conditions which may exacerbate or even cause depressive symptoms are chronic fatigue syndrome, candidiasis, hormonal imbalances, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and amino acid deficiencies. Thus, you may want get a complete physical to rule out any of the above conditions.

## Therapeutic Area #2: Mental/Emotional Self-Care

The new science of psychoneuroimmunology clearly documents the impact of the mind and emotions on the nervous system and immune functioning. Developing positive habits of thinking and feeling is an essential part of the success of your mental health recovery program.

### 1) Monitor your thoughts and your self-talk.

Words and beliefs have the power to change body chemistry. (Think of how the words “I love you” make you feel.) Researchers have discovered that those of us who suffer from anxiety and depression have the tendency to dwell on negative thoughts—about ourselves, the world, and our future—which produces a low or anxious mood. These thoughts fall into the following areas:

- 1) regrets about the past.
- 2) fears about the future.
- 3) negative statements and criticisms directed towards ourselves (also known as the inner critic).

Examine your beliefs about yourself, the world and the future, and determine if any of them need changing. Examples of irrational and self-defeating beliefs include, “It is important for everyone to like me all the time,” “I must be perfect in all that I do,” “I shouldn’t have to suffer,” and “It is my fault that I am depressed.” Upsetting feelings come from upsetting ideas. If you question and challenge the beliefs behind your uncomfortable feelings, you can become more and more free of negative emotions.

Many painful feelings are often the result of distorted, negative thinking, known as “cognitive distortions.” Some common distortions are: *all-or-nothing thinking* (seeing things in black-and-white categories); *mental filter* (picking out a single negative detail and dwelling on it exclusively); *disqualifying the positive*; *jumping to conclusions* (making a negative interpretation, even though there are no definite facts that support the conclusion); *mind reading* (arbitrarily concluding that someone else is reacting negatively to you without checking it out); *emotional reasoning* (assuming that negative emotions reflect the way things really are—i.e., “I feel it, therefore it must be true; *should statements*; and *personalization* (seeing yourself as the cause of some negative external event which you are not responsible for).

You may want to record your negative beliefs and cognitive distortions in **Section 3** of your recovery journal and next to them write more positive or realistic beliefs. A struc-

tured exercise on how to accomplish this appears on page 219 of my book, *Healing From Depression*. If you wish to work in depth to release your cognitive distortions, you can do so with a mental health professional who practices “cognitive behavioral therapy” (CBT).

## 2) Rate your mood on a daily basis.

A key aspect of your emotional self-care program involves monitoring your moods and emotions on a daily basis. Start tracking your moods using the **Daily Mood Scale** which appears below:

### Daily Mood Scale

5 feeling good *all* of the time (ecstasy or mania)

3-4 feeling good *much* of the time

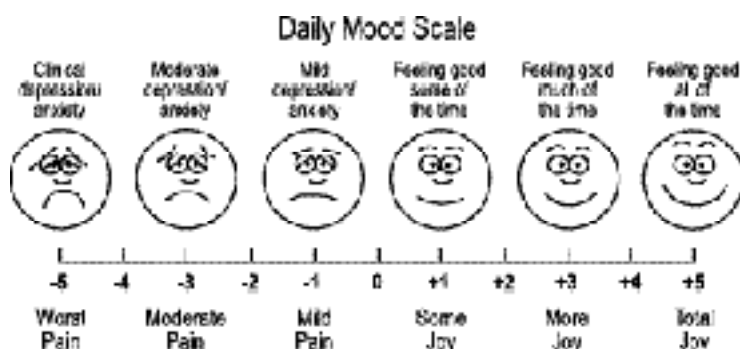
1-2 feeling good *some* of the time

0 absence of symptoms, feeling okay

-1 to -2 mild depression/ anxiety

-3 to -4 moderate depression/ anxiety

-5 clinical depression/ anxiety



You will use this scale to assign a numerical value to your mood, ranging from -5 to +5. To get started with this process, reflect on your state of mind and ask yourself, “How have I been doing? Have I experienced any symptoms of depression or anxiety? How has my general mood been?” (Given that my mood can fluctuate during the day, I wait until bedtime and then assign a number to my average mood for the day).

After noting how you have been feeling, assign your mood a number between -5 and +5 and write it beside today’s date in **Section 3** of your better mood recovery journal (pg. 44).

Keeping a daily mood journal is an important way to track your recovery. I tell my clients who are severely depressed to define recovery as having the numbers on their mood scale be *in the positive range* more often than not for at least six weeks. When this occurs, they are officially in remission.

Tracking subtle shifts in your moods can also alert you to the early signs of a depressive downturn. If you are doing well right now, keeping your rating at a zero or above is a good goal. Having your scores drop into the negative numbers will alert you to the early warning signs of a potential relapse so that you can take appropriate action to prevent a major depressive episode.

### **3) Stay in touch with all of your feelings.**

To remain emotionally healthy, it is necessary to feel *the full range* of all of your emotions, even the so-called “negative” ones of sadness, fear and anger. Entering individual or group therapy can provide a safe place where you can learn to identify your feelings and express previously repressed emotions.

### **4) Create a library of positive memories.**

This is a wonderful, self-empowering technique. Make a list of the ten happiest moments of your life. Go back in time and relive them, using your five senses to recreate, in exquisite detail, those joyful experiences. Then write them on a separate page in **Section 4** of your recovery journal (pg. 45). You can also include some pictures of yourself from happy times in your life.

When you are feeling a bit low or need some inspiration, you can recall those pleasant memories or read them over in your journal. Because the brain cannot differentiate between real or imagined events, you will receive the beneficial effects of pleasant-life experiences when you imagine them. This deceptively simple, yet powerful exercise can enhance your mood regardless of the external circumstances.

### **5) Use affirmations to accentuate the positive.**

An affirmation is a positive thought or idea that you consciously focus on in order to produce a desired result. The result may be a specific **goal** or **outcome** (doing well in school, making new friends, improving one’s health) or an improved attitude or **state of mind** (experiencing self-love, overcoming fear). You can create an affirmation for virtually any need, goal or challenge in life.

The repetition of affirmations over time can change negative fear-producing thoughts into positive uplifting ones, thereby leading to a change in mood. One of my clients created this simple, yet powerful affirmation: *I am healed, whole and complete. I am fully alive, filled with love, joy and gratitude.*

Affirmations work best when they arise from within. Here is a process for creating affirmations that I have used with great success in my groups.

Close your eyes. Go back in time and picture *three* different moments in your life where you felt proud or good about yourself. Perhaps you were engaging in a positive action, or someone gave you a compliment, or you reflected on one of your strengths. In each of these instances, think of an adjective that you could use to describe yourself in that moment. Next, take one of those adjectives and complete these sentences:

- a) I am \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b) (State your name), you are \_\_\_\_\_ .

For example, if I saw myself as courageous, my affirmations would be: 1) *I am courageous* and 2) *Douglas, you are courageous.*

Now open your eyes and use each of the three adjectives to complete the following sentences:

- 1) I am \_\_\_\_\_      You are \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) I am \_\_\_\_\_      You are \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) I am \_\_\_\_\_      You are \_\_\_\_\_

Write these statements in **Section 4** of your recovery journal.

I also recommend that you give your affirmations to a friend and ask him or her to repeat them back to you in the second person—i.e. my wife Joan would say to me, "*Douglas, you are courageous.*" Again, ask yourself, "What feelings come up when I hear this positive self-statement from another person?"

Finally, if you want to further increase the effectiveness of your affirmation, repeat it while "*looking in the mirror.*" (While this may feel awkward and uncomfortable at first, practice accepting the positive feedback. Over time, you will become more comfortable with the process.)

Henry Ford once said, “If you think you can, you can. If you think you can’t you can’t. Either way you are right.” Through the power of our thoughts and words, we have the ability to shape our inner and outer reality. When we learn to speak to ourselves in loving and kind way, we will both feel better and will attract more positive experiences in the outer world.

#### **6) Keep a gratitude journal.**

A powerful tool in healing from depression is to practice gratitude. Focusing on *what is working* in your life actually changes brain chemistry and allows you to counteract the negative thinking that is the hallmark of depression.

Expressing gratitude does not mean denying pain or uncomfortable feelings. It doesn’t mean pretending something is wonderful when it clearly isn’t. But when we focus exclusively on those dark and painful places, we close ourselves to the gifts that the universe brings. To create a gratitude journal, consider the following questions:

- What are the positive aspects of my life right now?
- What is working to support me in my health and healing?
- Has something happened recently that I appreciated?

If you think long enough you can probably uncover a blessing or two—e.g., “the sun is shining, I have a roof over my head, I have loving friendships, I am not in physical pain, I can see and hear, I have enough to eat, I feel love for my child or partner, I love my pet, etc.” Record any blessings in **Section 4** of your recovery journal. Over time, as you record the small blessings in your life, you will be more likely to see your glass as “half full” instead of “half empty.”

#### **7) Work on your unfinished family of origin issues (when appropriate).**

Unhealed trauma from the past (abandonment, neglect, abuse, etc.) can be an underlying cause of overt or covert depression. One of the most common forms of unfinished business is unexpressed grief. In his famous paper *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud postulated that depression was caused by incomplete mourning. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross identified the five stages of *death/grieving* as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. When we do not fully grieve a serious loss, we can get stuck in the depression phase. Hence, the incidence of depression in people who have experienced a significant loss in childhood—e.g., the death of a parent—is much higher than in those who have not. Therapy can help you to more fully resolve any incomplete grief you may be carrying, so that a more complete healing may occur.

### **8) Practice self-forgiveness.**

People who suffer from depression often criticize and blame themselves for things that went wrong in the past. For example, I have clients who are still upset with themselves:

- for dropping out of school.
- for going off medication and having a relapse.
- for getting into drugs and alcohol.
- for passing up a golden business opportunity.
- for having an unhappy marriage.
- for inadvertently hurting themselves or another person.

Some of these incidents occurred thirty to forty years ago. Nonetheless, people continue to mentally “beat themselves up” and hold themselves in contempt. Such self-blame and guilt further debilitates their already damaged self-esteem.

Healing from depression means that we release this self-blame and learn to forgive ourselves. This means having compassion for ourselves by seeing that we were doing “the best we could” with the awareness we had at the time.

### **Therapeutic Area #3: Social Support**

I have already emphasized that social support is an essential requirement for surviving a depressive episode. Please refer to Chapter 2 for information as to how you can develop a support network that will strengthen your psychological immune system so that you can heal from depression.

### **Therapeutic Area #4: Spiritual Connections**

Thus far, we have focused on the physical, mental and social supports that can help a person to heal from depression and anxiety. Now we are ready to address the next level of healing—the spiritual dimension. Spiritual resources such as faith, hope and courage are every bit as important to the person recovering from depression as are the more “tangible” medical treatments

Mental health researchers have defined a phenomenon known as “religious coping”—a reliance on a spiritual belief or activity to help manage emotional stress or physical discomfort. In other words, people with a defined spiritual philosophy or world view

seem to cope better with life's crises and challenge. A 1999 Duke University study of 4,000 adults found that attendance at a house of worship was related to lower rates of anxiety and depression. Let's look at various aspects of spirituality that can be used to promote emotional serenity.

### **1) Set time aside for prayer and meditation.**

The eleventh step of the 12 steps suggests that we "seek through prayer and meditation to improve our contact with our Higher Power." (It is helpful to think of prayer as talking to God, and of meditation as letting God talk to you.)

As far as I know, there are no scientific studies that document the efficacy of prayer in the healing of depression or other forms of mental illness. There do exist, however, documented cases about the success of prayer in physical healing, as shown in Larry Dossey's book, *Healing Words*. If prayer can alter physical matter, and the brain is made of material substance, then it seems reasonable that prayer can impact the brain chemistry that creates depression. (I have my own experience to testify to this truth.) Thus, I would encourage anyone with depressive illnesses to combine prayer with the traditional treatment modalities.

There are many different types of prayer. The success of prayer does not depend on your religious persuasion. (As AA puts it, "There are no atheists in foxholes.") If the word "prayer" seems too religious, think of the process as a way of connecting with your Higher Power, however you understand it to be. There is no right way to pray. The sincerity of your request and your intention to heal is more important than the structure you use.

Ideally, prayer should be connected with action. As one spiritual teacher put it, "You don't pray and then hang out in bed with your sneakers on. *Pray* as if everything depended on God, but *act* as if everything depended on you." If you bring a pure heart to your inner altar and remain open to the presence of grace, who knows what miracles may occur?

Meditation involves stilling the mind so that we can hear the "still small voice" of God within and be open to spiritual guidance. There are many sources of information on meditation available—TM (transcendental meditation), Zen centers, the books of Buddhist priest Thich Nhat Hahn, or the simple form of meditation described in Herbert Benson's work, *The Relaxation Response*. Since many people in the modern world are so mentally active, a walking meditation (consciously focusing on each step) is an excellent way to

calm the mind while burning off nervous energy. Spending time in nature is also a fine way to commune with one's spiritual source.

## **2) Seek spiritual community.**

Whatever your spiritual path, worshipping with others in spiritual community is a powerful way to deepen one's faith. All spiritual traditions have emphasized joining with others as a way to gain assistance in strengthening one's spiritual life. One of the Buddha's main teachings was to "seek the sangha"—i.e., a community of like-minded believers. Similarly, one of the greatest spiritual movements of the 20th century—Alcoholics Anonymous—has made community fellowship the foundation of its healing work. Moreover, the power of prayer can be enhanced in a group setting.

## **3) Be of service to others.**

All spiritual traditions stress service as a part of one's spiritual path. A fundamental symptom of depression (and unhappiness in general) is self-absorption. Service allows us to transcend our suffering by shifting our focus away from ourselves. As author Tracy Thompson writes in regard to her own recovery, "Help others. Be of service. Only in this way will you find your way out of the prison of self." In this vein, an article in *Psychology Today* reports that volunteer work leads to a phenomenon called "helper's high"—a physiological change in the body that produces physical and emotional well being, as well as relief from stress-related disorders.

The amount of service that you perform does not have to be large. If you are feeling limited in your capacity to give, start with some form of service that requires a low level of commitment—such as nurturing a pet or a plant. Extending yourself even a little bit will be good for the recipient and good for you.

## **4) Find purpose and meaning in your life**

Social scientists have long observed that rates of depression decrease during wartime and rise during peacetime. This is because during war, people have a clear sense of focus and mission—i.e., achieving military victory. This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of having purpose and meaning in our lives. During his concentration camp experience, psychiatrist Victor Frankl discovered that if a prisoner had a purpose for living after the war, he would be more likely to survive.

After the war, Frankl realized that the need for meaning was not just applicable to prisoners of war; it was a universal human need. In his role as a psychiatrist, Frankl discovered that many types of mental illness—including depression—improved when a person found a worthwhile purpose upon which to base his life. Conversely, he saw many people succumb to depression when they felt they had “nothing to live for.”

An example of someone who has found great purpose and meaning in her life is wildlife advocate Jane Goodall. Ms. Goodall first became recognized for her work with chimpanzees at the Gombe Preserve in Africa where she demonstrated that chimps had the ability to make and use tools, a province thought to be exclusive to humans. Since then she has founded Roots and Shoots, an environmental and humanitarian movement for young people, with branches in 57 countries. Asked why she didn't return to the peaceful reserve of Gombe to continue her scientific studies, Goodall replied:

I feel the need to make people see what we are doing to the environment. At this point, the more people I reach, the more I accomplish. I miss Gombe and my wonderful years in the forest, but if I were to go back to that, I wouldn't feel I was doing what I should be doing.

Here is a woman who is clearly has a purpose in her life.

### **Therapeutic Area #5: Leading a Healthy Lifestyle**

Thus far, we have focused on healing strategies that address the physical, mental/emotional, social and spiritual dimensions of life. Now we are going to look at other self-care activities which do not fit under any of these four categories. I have organized them under the theme of “lifestyle habits” because they represent specific behaviors that can be incorporated into our daily lives to enhance mood.

Here are some lifestyle habits that can help you to maintain balance and stability in your emotional life:

1) Find ways to create **structure** / **routine** in your daily activities. The presence of structure seem to decrease anxiety as many people report that they feel calmer when they have a schedule to their day.

2) Find ways to connect to the **natural world**. Whether it's watching a moonrise over a mountain peak, a sunset over the ocean, or simply taking a leisurely walk in your city park, spending time in nature can elicit a healing connection to Mother Earth.

Hiking in nature (in the woods, on the beach, etc.) is particularly beneficial because it combines the advantage of aerobic exercise with the feelings of awe and reverence that accompany being in the natural world. As John Muir, the founder of the American conservation movement said over 100 years ago: "Climb the mountains. Get their glad tidings. Let the winds and the storms blow their energy into you, and watch your cares drop off like autumn leaves."

3) Reduce **the stress** in your life. Take time to rest and regenerate so that you do not overextend yourself with too many projects or commitments. Because our culture puts so much emphasis on doing, it is important to schedule in periods of time to **relax and just "be."** You may wish to meditate, walk, listen to your favorite music, or engage in a hobby where you can relax in a focused way.

4) **Avoid using drugs and alcohol** as a means of alleviating discomfort. While it can be tempting to use alcohol to relax or get to sleep (or to use caffeine to focus), you run the risk of developing a new problem—chemical dependency. Apply the tools described in this section—e.g., deep breathing, exercise, massage, self-talk, 12-step groups, prescribed medication, etc.—as an alternative.

5) When asked for his definition of mental health, Sigmund Freud replied, "The ability to work and to love." **Employment is therapeutic** for a variety of reasons; it draws us outside of ourselves, brings us into contact with other people, and gives us a sense of identity and independence. As one middle-aged woman recently testified at a mental health conference, "The most important factor in my recovery was being able to return to work!" Conversely, I have seen depression brought on by a person's lack of employment, or being involved in work that does not express a genuine passion.

6) **Find ways to experience pleasure.** Related to the idea of relaxing is that of experiencing joy or pleasure. Since the absence of pleasure is one of the key symptoms of depression, incorporating pleasure into your life will be curative. Take a look at the table of ideas for pleasurable ideas that follows:

---

---

### Ideas for Pleasurable Activities

The following are some ideas for activities that can help you to bring more joy and pleasure into your life.

- go for a walk
- watch the sunrise/sunset
- tell a funny joke
- receive a massage
- sit in a hot tub
- see a special play
- drive to the beach
- pet an animal
- talk to a friend
- create with clay/pottery
- make a collage
- go sailing or canoeing
- hug a tree
- play golf or tennis
- ride a bike
- enjoy a good cup of tea
- watch the clouds
- practice deep breathing
- spend time with a friend
- enjoy the beauty of nature
- go bird watching
- rent a good video
- do aerobics/dance
- think of something you are grateful for
- share a hug with a loved one
- watch a funny movie
- listen to relaxing music
- take a warm bath
- play a musical instrument
- spend time in the garden
- swim, float, wade in the water
- treat yourself to a nutritious meal
- attend a favorite sports event
- make a bouquet of flowers
- draw/paint a picture
- go on a your favorite hike
- go star gazing
- jump on a trampoline
- read a special novel or magazine
- visit a museum/art gallery
- go on a camping trip
- do a gentle stretch
- attend a concert
- write in your journal
- take a vacation
- repeat a favorite affirmation
- do yoga
- think of an enjoyable memory
- buy yourself a special gift

---

---

As you read over the list, see if you can locate activities that are enjoyable, used to be enjoyable, or might be enjoyable—e.g. eating a good meal, working in the garden, nurturing a pet, spending time with friends, etc. After coming up with a list of activities, see if you can make them part of weekly goals in section five of the recovery journal (see pg. 45).

7) **Tune into the healing power of music.** Aside from “soothing the savage beast” music can be a balm for those suffering from depression and anxiety. Many spiritual traditions use sound vibrations to calm the emotions, still the mind and restore hope and inspiration. (Think of the soothing, reverential tones of Gregorian chants.) Music can be very relaxing, especially when it follows a rhythm of sixty to seventy beats per minute. Or, a rousing symphony can be just what you need to feel renewed and energized.

Ask yourself, “What kind of music makes me feel better?” Make a catalog of your favorite musical tunes, noting which ones are relaxing and which can be used for inspiration. You may want to make a tape or CD which you can play as a daily mood enhancer.

8) **Take time to laugh.** The proverb, “laughter is good medicine” is more than just a saying. Ever since Norman Cousins published his memoir *Anatomy of An Illness* in which he describes how he healed himself of a fatal illness through Vitamin C and laughter, the medical world has come to recognize the therapeutic value of humor. William Fry Jr., who has done research on the physiology of humor for the past 45 years, lends support to Cousin’s notion that laughter is like “internal jogging.” Laughter enhances respiration and circulation, oxygenates the blood, decreases stress hormones in the brain, and prevents “hardening of the attitudes.”

There are numerous ways that you can build laughter into your daily environment—having a humorous poster in your home or at the office, reading your favorite comic strip, engaging in joke-telling with your friends, receiving jokes over the Internet or renting films of your favorite comedians. Remember, “S/He who laughs, lasts.” It is almost impossible to feel depressed or anxious in the middle of a good belly laugh.

9) **Bring beauty into your life.** The ancient Greeks knew of the healing power of beauty. Beauty brings balance and harmony to the soul. There are other ways to bring beauty into your environment—through beautiful works of art (which can be reproductions and therefore inexpensive), photographs of your favorite spots in nature, nature calendars, having beautiful fabrics, rugs and tapestries, and surrounding yourself with your favorite colors. Bringing flowers into the home is a wonderful way to delight the senses and raise our spirits. Working in the garden, strolling in a park, or hiking in the forest is another way to experience the beauty of nature.

10) **Begin and end each day with an uplifting thought or word.** You may choose a prayer, an affirmation or a statement of thanksgiving. There are a host of daily affirmation books and collections of inspirational stories that you can refer to. This simple ritual of

focusing on and affirming the good helps to create an optimistic attitude which strengthens the immune system and the body's ability to cope with stress.

11) **Practice time Management.** Creating a healthy lifestyle means bringing certain mood-enhancing habits and activities into our daily lives. The key to making this happen is learning to manage our time. Taking the time to plan is the secret to creating a lifestyle that truly nurtures and supports us (See Paul Bragg's poem on the next page).

The book that introduced me to time management was Alan Lakein's classic "How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life." According to Lakein, successful time management begins with looking at your values and making a list of what is truly important in your life. After listing a list of those things that are most important, Lakein suggests that we prioritize our goals by assigning an "A" to those items that have high value, a "B" to those items that have medium value and a "C" to those that have the lowest value. Finally, Lakein suggests, make a daily "to do" list, blocking out periods of time each day to work on those high priority "A" goals.

Lakein's effective ABC priority system is based on the famous 80/20 rule, discovered by Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto who noted that if all items are arranged in order of value, then 80 percent of the value would come from 20 percent of the items. (I learned this first hand in sales when I discovered that 80% of my income came from 20% of my customers).

Lakein found that 80% of our tasks in life are "C" low value goals, and that although "A's" takes more work than "C's," they create far more value in the long run. For example, let's say that you make regular exercise one of your high priority goals. Although you may prefer to clean out your desk as opposed to working out at the gym, the "A" goal of physical exercise will pay the greater dividends in helping you to heal from depression. That is why exercise should be an "A" goal and a high priority in your daily routine.

---

---

### Take Time for 12 Things by Paul Bragg

1. Take time to **Work**;  
it is the price of success.
  2. Take time to **Think**;  
it is the source of power.
  3. Take time to **Play**;  
it is the secret of youth.
  4. Take time to **Read**;  
it is the foundation of knowledge.
  5. Take time to **Worship**;  
it is the highway of reverence and washes the dust of earth from our eyes.
  6. Take time to help and enjoy **Friends**;  
it is the source of happiness.
  7. Take time to **Love**;  
it is the sacrament of life.
  8. Take time to **Dream**;  
it hitches the soul to the stars.
  9. Take time to **Laugh**;  
it is the singing that helps with life's loads.
  10. Take time for **Beauty**;  
it is everywhere in nature.
  11. Take time for **Health**;  
it is the true wealth and treasure of life.
  12. Take time to **Plan**;  
it is the secret of having the time for the first eleven things.
- 
-

## CHAPTER 4

# PUTTING THIS PROGRAM INTO PRACTICE: SEVEN STEPS TO MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

The tools that I have provided in this e-book are designed to take your heartfelt desire for healing and translate it into daily self-care activities that will rewire your brain and elevate your mood. Here are series of steps that will tie together all that you have learned

**Step 1. Create your recovery journal** using the instructions provided in the introduction,

**Step 2. Set the intention to heal.** Make the decision that you want to get well (even if you don't know how).

**Step 3. Write your vision statement of wellness** and place it in Section 1 of your better mood recovery journal. (A template for this section appears on page 41.) Read this vision statement on a daily basis. Good times to do so are either upon awakening or before you go to sleep.

**Step 4. Locate a number of people who can be a part of your support team**—individuals who will provide you with feedback and support on your journey to recovery. Write their names down in Section 2 of your recovery journal. (A template for this section appears on page 42.)

**Step 5. Track you daily mood and self-care activities** in Section 3 of your recovery journal. In addition, write down any medications you took and notes about your self-care activities. (A template for this section appears on page 44.)

**Step 6. Spend time each day focusing on positive thoughts and feelings.** Reading the affirmations, “library of positive memories” and gratitude list from Section 4 of your recovery journal will help you to accomplish this. (A template for this section appears on page 45.)

**Step 7: Set short-term weekly goals.** In addition to reading your vision statement, connecting with others, tracking your moods, and focusing on the positive, you will want to engage in some simple goal-setting. Section 5 of your recovery journal provides a format

whereby you can write down and track your weekly goals. (A template for this section appears on page 46.)

To start the process, think about what changes you would like to make in your life that would lead to a better mood. This might involve incorporating one the self-care activities into your life. Then, break this task down into a series of small steps that will make this goal a reality.

An example of how this process works can be seen in the life of Barbara, who wanted to add exercise into her daily routine. Barbara came up with the following steps:

- 1) Call the local gym to research their rates.
- 2) Call local pool and find out lap swim hours.
- 3) Talk to fitness instructors about the merits of treadmills and swimming.
- 4) Work out at the gym at 9 am, Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
- 5) Swim at the pool on Tuesday and Thursday after work.

For the first week, Barbara can make the completion of step #1 her goal. If she completes it, she can move on to step #2, or wait until the next week. After a few weeks of implementing her short-term goals, she will attain her larger goal of bringing exercise into her life.

When you set goals, I recommend that you share your goal with another person, preferably someone in your support network. When you state your goals in the presence of another person, you become accountable to that person. Most people find that it is far easier to keep a promise they have made to someone else than one they have made to themselves.

For example, let's say I tell my coach Marilyn to call me on Friday at 4 P.M. to see if I have written the introduction to my newest book proposal. Friday afternoon arrives and I still have not begun the proposal. Being a good procrastinator, I might think, "This would be a good time to mow the lawn." But then I remember that Marilyn will be calling in an hour. Rather than break my word to her, I sit down at the computer to start my writing.



## **THE BETTER MOOD RECOVERY JOURNAL**

In the pages that follow, I have provided some templates for you to use in the five sections of your better mood recovery journal.

### **Section 1 Your Vision Statement of Wellness**

In this section, you will place your vision statement of wellness and/or your healing collage (from Chapter 1 ). You can either write it out longhand, or type it and print it out from your word processor. Feel free to add extra pictures or feedback from friends and relatives about their vision of your recovery.

## Section 2

### Creating Your Support Network

Use this section to write down a list the most important people in your support network (from Chapter 2 ). You can use the following format as a guide.

<b>Person</b>	<b>Phone number</b>	<b>Role in my recovery</b>
---------------	---------------------	----------------------------

1.

2..

3.

4.

5.

**Contact notes:**

<b>Person</b>	<b>Date of Contact</b>	<b>Response</b>
---------------	------------------------	-----------------

### Section 3

## Instructions for Using Your Daily Journal and Monthly Mood Diary

The template on the next page provides a structure for you to track your mood, medications (if you take any) and self-care activities. I recommend that you photocopy this sheet to produce as many forms as you need.

Or, you can create your own version on your computer and print out the copies you need.

A third option is to use the template as a model and create your own form by hand.

### Section 3 My Daily Journal

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mood ( -5 to +5 ) \_\_\_\_\_

Meds/remedies:

#### **Self-Care Notes.**

Write below any important self-care activities that you participated in today.

**Physical**

**Mental/Emotional**

**Social support**

**Spiritual**

**Lifestyle habits** (e.g. being in nature, beauty, pleasurable activities, laughter, etc.)

Other thoughts or feelings, or a description of an important event.

## **Section 4**

### **Accentuate the Positive**

In the pages that follow, you will be recording the following:

- your library of positive memories (see Chapter 4).  
Feel free to add additional pages of photos or mementos of positive memories.
  
- your daily affirmations (see Chapter 4)
  
- a list of what you are grateful for (see Chapter 4)

Set aside or add whatever pages you need.

## Section 5 My Weekly Goal Sheet

My goals for the week of:

Goal or goals:

Benefits of attaining this goal:

Steps I can take that will move me towards the goal:

**Ongoing goals** (check off the ones as you accomplish them)

Read my vision statement daily (upon awakening or before bed)

Chart my moods in the Monthly Mood Diary

Participate in some form of exercise or movement



### Assessing the week

How well did I do? What was my average mood during the week (rate -5 to +5)?

What did I learn from my week that will help me to plan for the next week?

## CHAPTER 5

### FINAL THOUGHTS

As you may have surmised, there is nothing new or radical in what I have suggested here. The recovery plan I have outlined is a simple, common sense approach to living a healthy and balanced life.

If you are diligent about following the steps I have just outlined, you will begin to see positive changes in your mood. A significant advantage of this kind of active participation is that it puts you in charge of your healing. You are about to become your own personal trainer, your own coach, your own guide and healer. This level of involvement acts as a powerful antidote to the feelings of powerlessness that so often accompany the experience of depression. Or as one group member put it, "Good things happen when you take the throttle."

Remember that for progress to occur, you will need the support of other people. Continue to interact with your support network as well as with your counselor / therapist. Stay involved with people, whether it is through your family, friends, church, work or a through a volunteer position. Join a depression support group in your area. If you can't find one, try a 12-step group or regular group therapy. Don't be afraid to ask for help when your level of depression makes it difficult to follow through with your goals. Reaching out for support is a sign of strength.

Also, remind yourself that progress towards health is not a straight line. Periods of forward movement are sometimes interrupted by unwanted setbacks. Often we take two steps forward, then one step backward. Be patient with yourself and with the healing process. As poet Jack Kerouac said, "Walking on water wasn't built in a day."

There is one final point that I would like to emphasize. No matter how many episodes of depression you have experienced, **you are not your illness**. The label "depression" does not define who you are but *how* you are suffering. If you start to believe that having depression makes you inherently defective, remind yourself that *you are a normal person responding to an abnormal condition*. Your spiritual essence transcends depression and cannot be touched by it or any illness. As the great 20th century visionary Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

Above all, try to be at peace with your condition. Some people have diabetes, others heart disease; you get to deal with depression. By applying the strategies described in this book, you can take small steps to improve the quality of your life. Remember, life is not always about fairness, but about how gracefully we learn the teachings of our unique path. Best wishes on your transformational journey.



I would like to close with an inspirational story of recovery, written by a woman who attended my depression support groups. Patricia describes the long and arduous period of rebuilding her life after a serious depressive breakdown at the age of twenty six.

**Patricia's Story:  
"I Am Grateful for the Little Things"**

Twelve years ago I had a job in the center of the New York art world. It was all the things I had ever dreamed it could be; high-powered, glamorous, exciting, financially remunerative. I could afford my own apartment in Manhattan, occasional trips to Europe, good books, wonderful food. I spent the summers working in the Hamptons, was strong and fit and loving New York. Then, due to some badly administered prescription drugs, I had a horrible nervous breakdown. The drug reaction created a combination of high anxiety, severe depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder that had me washing my hands hundreds of times a day. I left New York for Ohio, for what I thought would be a few months, to try to put myself back together again. I never lived in New York again.

It was my psychiatrist in Ohio who gave me the first ray of hope that I could get better. "Your house (psyche) has been razed to the ground," Dr. Swanson said. "We will rebuild it, with a foundation so strong it will never fall down again." It took me ten years for the rebuilding to occur, for me to come all the way back, mentally and emotionally. For the first two years, I couldn't even work. Simple chores like mopping the floor, grocery shopping, or doing laundry that I once would have done without a second thought took hours and left me exhausted. I often fell asleep after finishing one of them, although I slept 11 hours every night.

My first job, after two years of gradual healing, was as a bus girl. Whereas once I made many thousands of dollars a year, now I worked for a meal and a few dollars an hour. But that job gave me enough confidence to apply for my next job, as a bookstore clerk. After three more years, I was about 70% back. I fell in love, married a wonderful man and moved to the Pacific Northwest, still working for a bookstore. Then I took a stint in an art supply store for two years. Finally, I was able to reenter the art world on a very small scale. Now I work at the library, paint, show and teach. My marriage is solid. I'm back to 100% of where I was before, emotionally, mentally and artistically and beginning to push beyond that to deeper levels of healing.

I am so very grateful to have my life back again. When I remember what it was like to be sick, I almost cry with relief and gratitude that I once again have a mind that works and a spirit that can feel joy as well as sadness. I am most grateful for the little things, the simple things—waking up slowly over a cup of coffee; basking in the warmth of the returning sun; lying on the couch and reading the Sunday paper; losing myself in a good book; trading stories and jokes over dinner with a good friend; watching the light glisten on the leaves; listening to bird song, the wind in the trees, or the sound of a slow soaking; feeling at peace; going for a quiet walk in the park; taking a road trip alone to the mountains, absorbing the landscape along the way; feeling both loving and lovable; and most of all, being able to paint again.

I have rebuilt my life, in many ways better than before. I doubt I shall ever again have the material abundance that I once had. But I have learned that material things can vanish in an instant. I put more value on relationships, spiritual and artistic growth, building community, and self-healing than on reacquiring the things I once owned. I am hopeful that I have reached the goal that my psychiatrist set for me when we first met in the hospital—to rebuild my house on a foundation so strong it will never fall down again. I feel like Estelle peixa, Portuguese for starfish, an idiom meaning “the creature which regenerates from deep wounds and creates joy.”

## RESOURCES FOR WELLNESS

Clinical depression is a serious, complex and often deadly illness. What follows is a compilation of books, organizations and Web sites that provide information that will help you and the partner in your life and your journey to healing.

### Recommended Reading

Bloch, Douglas, *Healing From Depression: 12 Weeks to a Better Mood*, Berkeley, Celestial Arts, 2002.

*Words That Heal the Blues: Affirmation and Meditations for Living Optimally With Mood Disorders*, Berkeley, Celestial Arts, 2004.

Bourne, Edmund J.,

*The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*, Oakland, New Harbinger Publications, 1995.

Copeland, Mary Ellen, *The Depression Workbook: A Guide to Living with Depression and Manic Depression*, Oakland, New Harbinger Publications, 1992.

Jamison, Kay Redfield, *An Unquiet Mind*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. The classic memoir about manic-depressive illness.

Murray, Michael, *Natural Alternatives to Prozac*. New York, William Morrow and Company, 1996. A comprehensive and well-researched account of the most common natural remedies for depression.

Rosen, Laura Epstein and Xavier Francisco Amador, *When Someone You Love Is Depressed: How to Help Your Loved One without Losing Yourself*, New York, The Free Press (Simon and Schuster), 1996. A well-researched and helpful book on how to support a friend or loved one who is depressed.

Solomon, Andrew, *The Noonday Demon*, New York, Scribner, 2001. An excellent melding of memoir and informational reporting.

Styron, William, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness*, New York, Vintage Books, 1990. During my depressive episode, this book was my bible. Here was someone who truly understood what my hell was like, and described it in exquisite detail.

## **Mental Health Organizations**

### **American Psychiatric Association**

1400 K Street NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 682-6220  
<http://www.psych.org>

### **American Psychological Association**

750 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(202) 336-5800  
<http://www.apa.org>

### **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)**

730 North Franklin, Suite 501  
Chicago, IL 60610  
(800) 82-NDMDA  
<http://www.dbsa.org>

A nonprofit group that provides educational information about depressive and manic depressive illness. Call for support groups.

### **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)**

2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300  
Colonial Place3  
Arlington, VA 22201  
(800) 950-NAMI  
<http://www.nami.org>

The nation's voice on mental illness, NAMI is the national umbrella organization for more than 1,000 local support and advocacy groups for families and individuals affected by serious mental illnesses. Contact them to learn more about groups in your area, as well as how to connect with local affiliates.

### **National Association of Social Workers**

750 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
(800) 638-8799  
<http://www.socialworkers.org>

## Suicide Prevention Organizations

### **National Hopeline Network**

Toll free (888) SUICIDE—(888) 784-2433

**<http://www.hopeline.com>**

The nationwide toll-free suicide hotline provides free 24-hour crisis counseling for people who are suicidal or who are suffering the pain of depression. Confidentiality is assured. Case management is also offered to connect people with healing resources in their local communities.

### **The Samaritans Suicide Hotline**

(617) 247-0220; (212) 673-3000; (401) 272-4044

**E-mail: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)**

<http://mentalhelp.net/samaritans/> (U.S. Web site)

**<http://www.samaritansnyc.org> (New York Web site)**

The Samaritans are a UK (United Kingdom) charity, founded in 1953, which exists to provide confidential emotional support to any person who is suicidal or despairing, and to increase public awareness of issues around suicide and depression. This service is provided 24 hours every day by trained volunteers. It is free. You are guaranteed absolute confidentiality and that you will not be judged.

### **Covenant House Nineline**

346 W. 17th Street

New York, NY 10011

(800) 999-9999

**<http://www.covenanthouse.org>**

This hotline provides 24-hour crisis intervention, support and referrals for youth in crisis—i.e., for runaways, abandoned youth, and those who are depressed or suicidal. Help is also available for adults. Last year nineline's trained staff received over 63,000 crisis calls.

### **Telephone Prayer Ministries**

Telephone ministries perform a valuable service to all who seek prayer support. Having a prayer partner is not only consoling, the presence of “two or more” souls activates an energy field that can attract Divine healing and grace. Please feel free to use the following resources as Spirit directs you.

#### **Silent Unity**

1901 NW Blue Parkway

Unity Village, MO 64065

**(800) 669-7729**

(816) 251-3554 fax

e-mail: [unity@unityworldhq.org](mailto:unity@unityworldhq.org)

The granddaddy of prayer ministries was founded in 1890 by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore as the “Society of Silent Help.” When you call, you will speak to a live person who will respond to your request with an affirmative prayer treatment. Your request will be prayed over for 30 days by the Silent Unity prayer team. In addition, you may ask to be sent a healing affirmation and support literature.

#### **World Ministry of Prayer**

3251 West Sixth Street

P.O. Box 75127

Los Angeles, CA 90075-0127

(213) 385-0209; (213) 388-1926 fax

(800) 421-9600

e-mail: [inquiry@wmop.org](mailto:inquiry@wmop.org)

<http://www.wmop.org>

Run by the Church of Religious Science, this live 24-hour prayer line functions like that of Silent Unity. When you call, a person will pray with you over your request. The prayer team will hold you in the light for the next 30 days and will send you a letter of support, as well as two or three affirmations.

**Guideposts Prayer Line**

**(800) 204-3772** (for a live person, 8 am to 9 pm, Eastern time, Monday-Friday)

**(971) 221-1100** (for Guideposts' 24 hour recorded telephone ministry where you can receive a recorded prayer or spiritual advice. You do not need to dial a "1" before the phone number)

**[http://www.dailyguidposts.com/prayer/request\\_prayer.asp](http://www.dailyguidposts.com/prayer/request_prayer.asp)** (to pray on-line)

A service of the inspirational *Guideposts Magazine*, founded by Norman Vincent Peale.