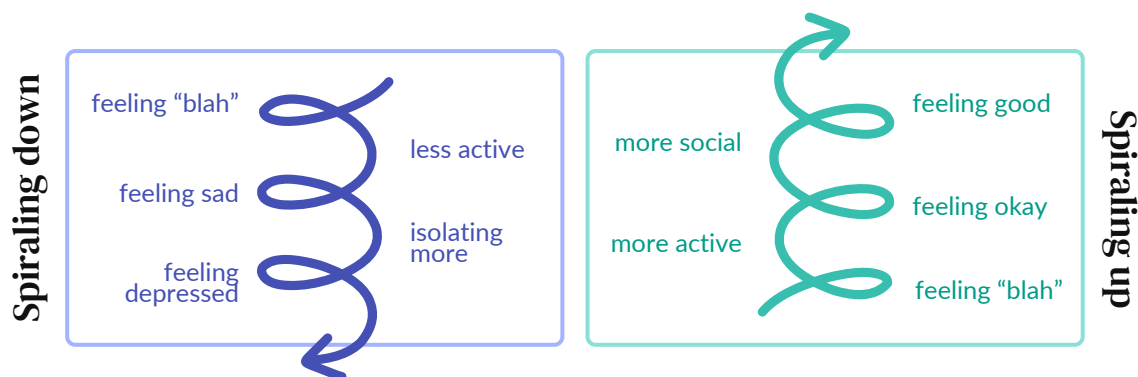


Behavior Activation for Depression

Behavior activation, or activity scheduling, is a cognitive behavioral technique that has been shown to help people overcome depression. Often, we wait to engage in activity until we “feel like it” - that is, until our mood is high enough to feel motivated. Behavior activation encourages us to do the opposite, and shows us that acting *first* can be a powerful way to improve mood, especially for people dealing with sadness or depression.

Spiraling down and spiraling up

One of the most challenging aspects of depression is how **symptoms can reinforce one another**. When we feel down, we are more likely to withdraw, slow down, or isolate. As a result, we feel even more down. This does not mean that depression is your fault - withdrawing is often a *part of* depression. However, we can intentionally take advantage of the connections between our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors to “spiral up.”



Think of a day you “spiraled down.” What happened? Which behaviors showed up?

Think of a day you “spiraled up.” What happened? Which behaviors helped?

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



Behavior Activation for Depression

Tracking your moods and behaviors

Continue to discover connections between your behaviors and moods by tracking for one week. Note your activities during each time period and your mood, from 1 (very low) to 10 (very good).

Sat									
Fri									
Thu									
Wed									
Tue									
Mon									
Sun	Ex: sleeping	social media, 4	eating, chores, 6						
	6am to 8am	8am to 10am	10am to 12pm	12pm to 2pm	2pm to 4pm	4pm to 6pm	6pm to 8pm	8pm to 10pm	10pm to 12am

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Behavior Activation for Depression

Review your data

Look at your week of tracking, and consider the following questions:

Which activities were associated with low mood? What about the lowest mood?

Which activities were associated with high mood? What about the highest mood?

Did anything surprise you?

Which behaviors or activities are most effective in raising mood?

You can combine your findings above with insights from research on the connections between activities and mood.

Depression often results in feeling less interested in previously enjoyed activities, less confident, more isolated, and less active. It is *expected* that **pleasurable, challenging, social, and active behaviors** are more difficult for someone experiencing depression. However, if we can engage in these behaviors in small ways, consistently, we can support a healthier mood and “spiral up.” On the lists on the next page, check off or write in any behaviors you are interested in experimenting with to boost your mood.

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Behavior Activation for Depression

Pleasure activities you genuinely find joy in

- ☐ Playing, listening, or dancing to music
- ☐ Going to a concert, show, or play
- ☐ Reading
- ☐ Arts and crafts
- ☐ Getting out into nature
- ☐ Sitting in the sun
- ☐ Going to the movies
- ☐ Planning a party
- ☐ Playing with pets
- ☐ Going out to eat or cooking your favorite food

Challenge building skill and accomplishment

- ☐ Doing crosswords or puzzles
- ☐ Playing board games
- ☐ Learning a new language
- ☐ Learning to code
- ☐ Cooking something new
- ☐ Completing chores or odd jobs around the house
- ☐ Trying a new exercise or sport
- ☐ Organizing things
- ☐ Learning more about my interests

Social connecting with others

- ☐ Coffee or tea with a friend
- ☐ Visiting family
- ☐ Singing in a choir
- ☐ Volunteering in my community
- ☐ Joining community groups or clubs
- ☐ Calling, texting, or messaging a friend
- ☐ Going to the library
- ☐ Going to a sporting event
- ☐ Going on dates

Active moving your body

- ☐ Yoga or stretching
- ☐ Walking or hiking outside; mall walking
- ☐ Running or jogging
- ☐ Roller skating, biking, skateboarding
- ☐ Playing team sports (soccer, football, kickball)
- ☐ Playing tennis, squash, or pickleball
- ☐ Lifting weights
- ☐ Swimming or water aerobics
- ☐ Dancing

Plan in advance

Now that you know which activities already support your mood and which you'd like to try, it's time to schedule activities in advance!

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is to *start small*. As with any lifestyle change, it is much easier to maintain a just few new activities over time. Although it may be tempting to make many changes at first, the likelihood that this is sustainable is low, resulting in becoming discouraged and giving up. **Even one new activity is better than none!**

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Behavior Activation for Depression

On this page, schedule pleasant, challenging, social, active, or other mood-boosting activities in advance. When complete, rate your mood. Remember to start off small, with only a few activities that are easy to complete!

Sunday

Ex: cook new recipe for dinner with partner, 6

Monday

Ex: neighborhood walk after work, 5

Tuesday

Ex: Video chat with friend in the evening, 7

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

At the end of the week, review your data. Are your activities associated with pleasant mood? Are there any you would like to continue next week? Are there any you would like to try instead next week? Do you have a healthy mix of pleasant, challenging, social, and active activities?

Also, remember that you can always go back to the first tracker if you need more detail, or you would like to focus on identifying “spiraling down” activities to replace with “spiraling up” activities.

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy for Depression](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

