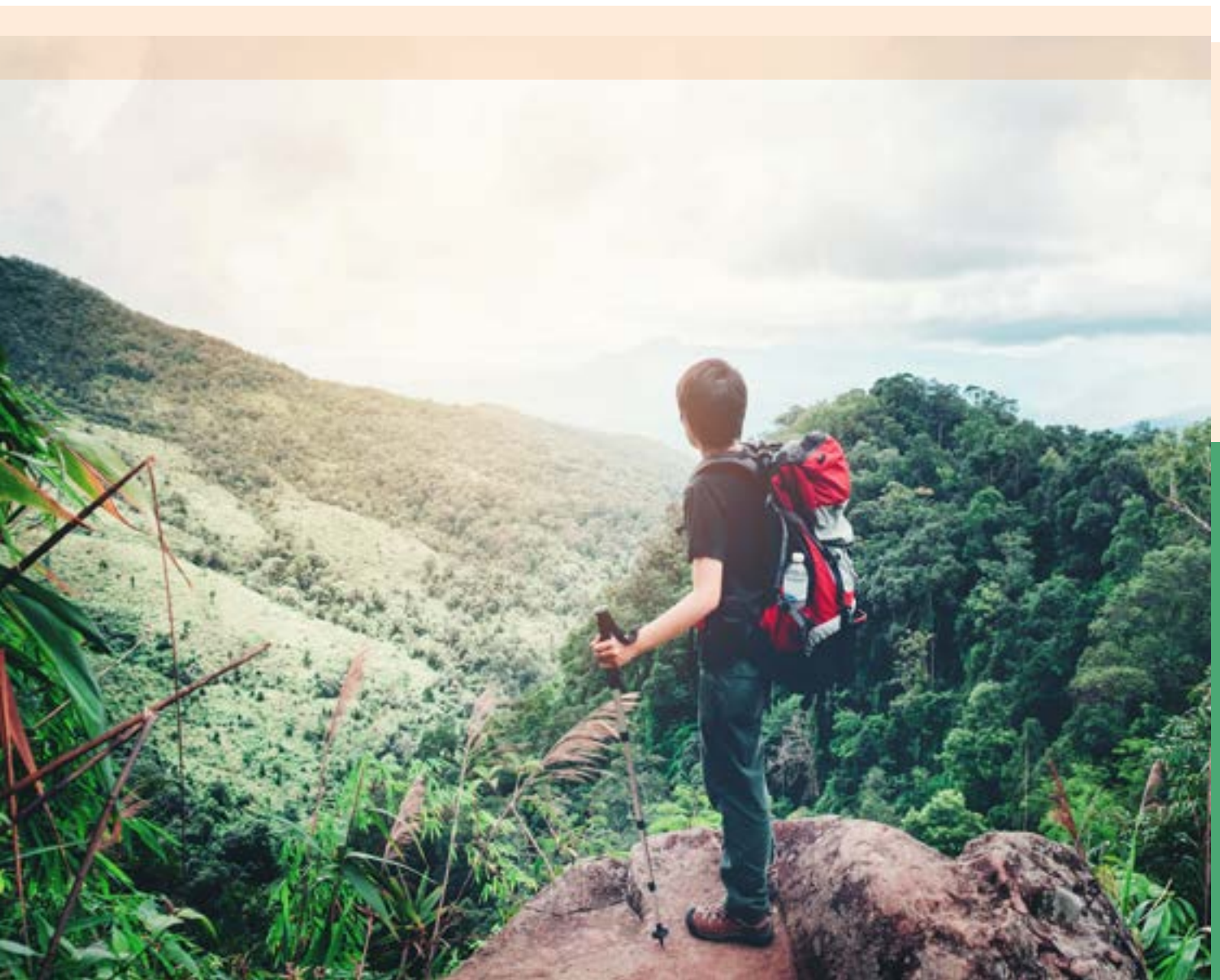


RECOVERY TOOLS

MH | 05

Things you can do to fight depression or anxiety, and start feeling better.

"Healing takes courage, and we all have courage, even if we have to dig a little to find it." -Tori Amos





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Cover photo:
Sarinya Pinngam.
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WRITER'S NOTE

When I was a young pastor, my boss, Gary Rust, asked me to go jogging with him. Well, I was 15 years younger than he was, and in good shape, so I figured I'd be setting the pace. I showed up at the jogging track in sweats and tennis shoes, ready for a casual jog. Then Gary arrived, dressed like the serious runner he was. This was the 80s, so he had on those mini shorts with slits up the sides, and the whole running outfit. This guy meant business. And when we started to run, he lapped me. I thought: "Wow! I'm 15 years his junior, and he's walking all over me!" One day, he invited me to run a marathon with him, and I wasn't to be outdone, so we trained. On the day of the marathon, he was sick, so I ran it without him. And the strangest thing happened. I felt so good! After that, I never quit exercising. I was hooked.

I think much more clearly when I exercise, sleep well, and eat good food. When I'm healthy, I'm not a prisoner of my emotions; I can manage them. You can't win the battle of the mind if your body gives out. I still battle with myself. Some days I don't want to be active or eat right. But I know the kind of life I have when I take care of myself versus the kind of life without it, and to me, it's not worth missing a day.

-Gary

Photo by Miroslav Liska.
Opposite photo by
Olena Danileiko.
Dreamstime.com

Body + Mind = One Whole Person

You're a complete package - your body and mind don't work without each other. God took care of Elijah's body before engaging his brain.



The brain is constantly adapting -Maryanne Wolf

If you flip through this booklet, you'll see articles about exercise, sleep, and taking better care of yourself. It might look like we're just telling you how to get in shape and take care of your physical body, instead of about mental health. But don't be deceived by appearances. We're still laser-focused on mental health, and this issue, in particular, is full of tangible steps you can take to improve your mental health. Sometimes the physical things are the first step on the road to feeling better.

In the *Depression* issue, we talked about the prophet Elijah's low point. Right after God won a massive victory through him on Mt. Carmel, Elijah was overcome by feelings of failure and ran for his life into the wilderness.

"I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. (1 Kings 19:4-5 NIV).

But God didn't forget about Elijah. He knew exactly what his exhausted prophet needed.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again (1 Kings 19:5-6 NIV).

So Elijah went back to sleep. Later the

angel visited him again "and touched him, and said, 'Get up and eat.'" And after eating a second time, Elijah was ready for the long journey to Mt. Sinai, where he talked with God about his feelings of failure. God listened to Elijah, heard his pain, and helped him find a solution as a wise leader should. But before God did any of that, he took care of Elijah's physical needs.

God knew that Elijah could not confront his feelings while he was overwhelmed by fear, hunger, or exhaustion. And if those things were hard for Elijah to ignore, they're probably a big deal for us, too. That's why the first step to feeling better is taking care of the physical needs that affect our mental health.

Exercise makes your brain stronger

Physical activity increases the size of your brain. Mental health, cognitive function,

Have you ever studied or worked after missing a night of sleep? How was it?

Imagine you are Elijah, and you've hit bottom. Then, God makes you food. How do you feel?

What's one way that you feel inspired to make your body stronger and clear your mind?

Say a prayer - ask for God to help you heal your body and mind like he did for Elijah.

Exercise strengthens your body and mind and helps you avoid the pitfalls of negative thoughts.

Stress, depression, and anxiety also lessen when you're active.

and memory improve, and stress, depression, and anxiety lessen. Find more information about exercise and how to fit it into your day on page 10.

Sleep is a time for your brain to heal and process your emotions. Getting a healthy amount of sleep at consistent times is a crucial part of recovery. You can read tips for improving your sleep, starting on page 12.

Even food can help Healthy diet, especially a Mediterranean diet with healthy fats like olive oil and nuts, is brain fuel. It gives your mind the power to process more clearly. And when

you think better, you can more easily see past the negative thoughts that depression and anxiety invent. Page 8 has lots of great advice on living a healthy life.

Keep reading to learn how to take care of your body, and grow your brainpower. This issue is chock full of healthy tips that will give you the competitive edge over depression and anxiety, and if you want go beyond what you find here, turn to page 19 and explore the resources for self-help and healthy living.

So go! Read! Find out how to feed your body's needs and grow your mind. We believe in you!

Taking care of your body builds healthy pathways in your mind. Photo: Sergey Khakimullin. Dreamstime.com



Taking Care of You

Mental and physical health aren't two separate things. You're one whole person, body and mind. If your mental health isn't great, you can get physical symptoms like pain or immune issues. If your physical health is poor, you may struggle mentally too. To build a healthy mind, you'll need to take care of you.

Your body and mind are linked – they're both a part of you. To help your brain heal, you'll need to take good care of your physical health. A healthier, more powerful body creates brain pathways that you need to fight back against depression and anxiety. Here are some things you can try to build a stronger body and mind

Get some exercise, even a little

It's hard to think of moving when you're exhausted and overwhelmed, but even five minutes a day helps to strengthen healthy brain pathways and gives you a boost of energy. Turn to "Moving Your Body" on page 10 for exercise ideas.

Practice good sleep hygiene

Depression and anxiety are linked to poor sleep, so you may have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or sleeping too much or too little. Regular, healthy sleep is one of the best things you can give to your body and your brain. Sleep is healing, and we don't function very well without it. Read "How to Get Better Sleep" on page 12 for tips to get the rest you need.

Remember to eat, but only at mealtimes

Sometimes depression and anxiety make you lose your appetite entirely. Other times, your hunger gets out of control, making you want to eat all the time. Your body needs fuel to function but in healthy amounts. Find balance by setting regular mealtimes, avoiding snacks between meals, and eating at least something at each meal. Moving every day might also help your appetite.

A Mediterranean diet with olive oil and nuts helps improve mental health in some people. But the most important dietary advice is to eat healthy, balanced meals whenever possible. If you're too tired to cook, grab salads, or whole fruits and veggies, and consider buying prepared meals sometimes until you get more energy.

Avoid alcohol and unprescribed drugs

Alcohol is a depressant – not something you want to put in your body if you're hoping to feel less depressed. Many treatment clinics encourage their patients to give it up altogether. And drugs that your doctor didn't prescribe could react badly with current medications, or change brain functioning in ways that counteract your treatment. Talk to your doctor before starting any new medications.

Face-to-face connections are best

Talking to friends online can do some good when there's no other option, but your brain needs in-person community to thrive. On social media, you'll see a carefully curated collection of highlights from other people's lives, and comparing your daily life with other people's highlights can leave you feeling behind and alone. In one study, a group of people showed improvement from their depression simply by deleting a popular social media platform. If you do choose to use social media, be responsible. Choose set times to check in, and log out during other times to avoid endless scrolling. And most of all, include face-to-face connections whenever you can.



Your body and mind are linked – they're both a part of you. Take good care of your physical health. Building a stronger, healthier body creates brain pathways that you need to fight back against depression and anxiety. Photo by Khunaspix - Dreamstime.com.

Don't rule out exercise, even when you're tired. Start small and find out what works for you.

Depression and anxiety can leave you feeling exhausted. And when even getting out of bed sounds like a chore, exercise can feel overwhelming. But don't give up. There are lots of manageable ways to fit movement into your day. Moving your body, even a little bit, is more than worth the effort. Studies have shown that just five minutes of walking each day makes a difference in your mental health. Starting to move, in any way that works for you, is probably the single biggest thing you can do on your own to create healthier brain pathways, build up more energy, decrease stress, and boost positive thinking.

Exercise and mental health

Regular aerobic exercise, the kind that gets your heart pumping, increases the size of your brain and helps it create positive connections. You'll enjoy better memory, sharper cognitive function, and decreased stress. But exercise isn't done yet – you'll get another secret power boost. Turns out, moving your body is one of the only things that can make a depressed brain feel good. Scientists state that physical activity "increases positive affect", which is a fancy way of saying that getting your heart pounding can give you the kind of warm, happy feelings that depression often

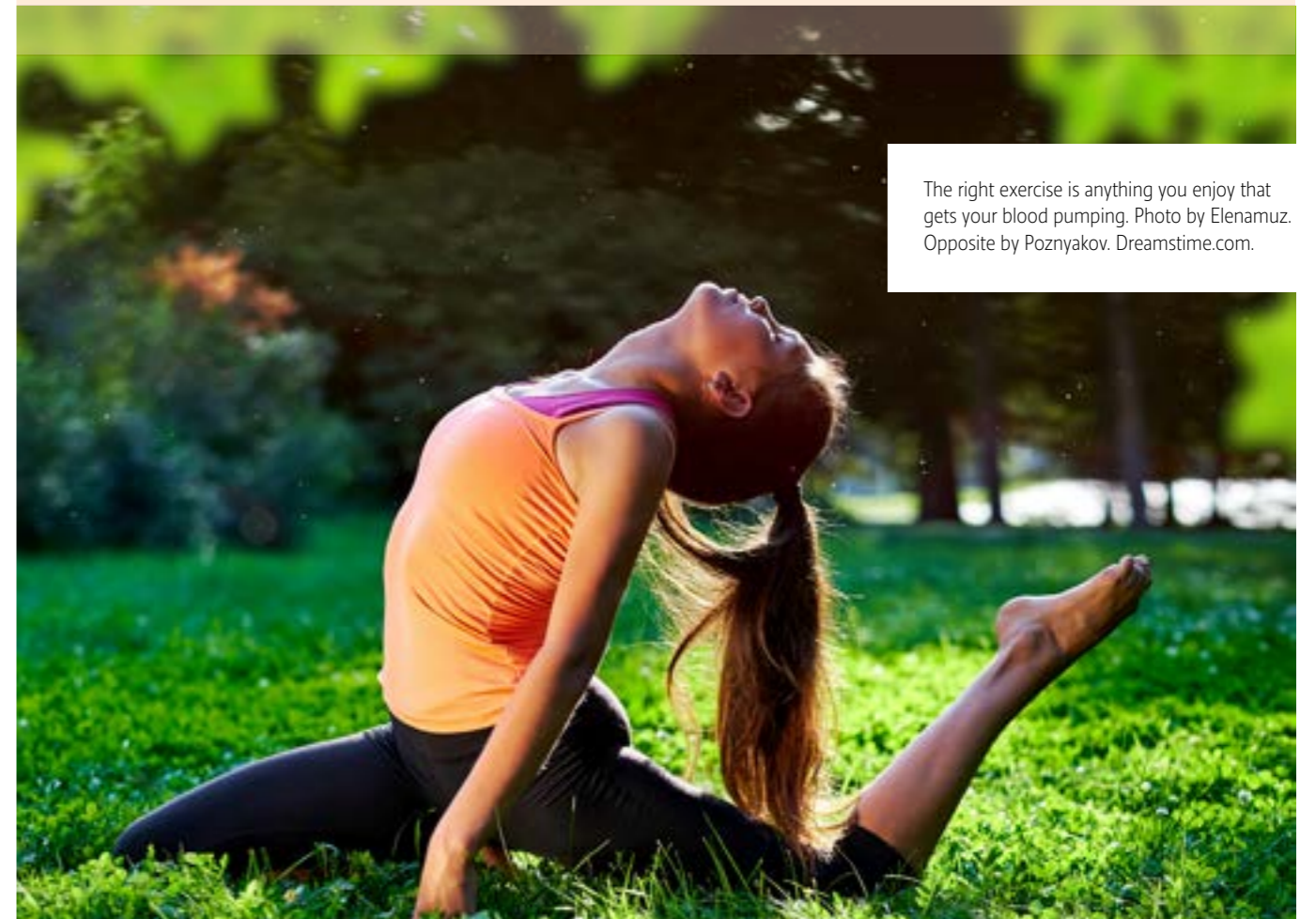
blocks out. Plus, exercise helps you sleep better and reduces depression and anxiety over time. For some people, especially those with mild or moderate depression and anxiety, regular exercise has done as much to improve their depression or anxiety as taking an antidepressant. And whether your doctor recommends medication for you or not, you can still add exercise to your daily routine and reap the benefits. You'll feel better, think more clearly and handle stress more easily.

How much exercise?

Any amount of exercise will help. And the more you do, the better you'll feel, which will give you more energy to step it up a notch. Start with whatever you can handle and gradually work your way up to more. Once you can manage 20 minutes of moderate exercise three times per week, you're golden. That much is enough to make a big difference in depression or anxiety levels. And when you're ready for even more, you can aim for maximum benefits with at least 30 minutes of heart-pumping activity, five or more days each week. But remember, you can get there over time. In the beginning, just do something. Walk around the block, dance to your favorite song – anything you add into your day is a start,



Moving Your Body: Your Kind of Exercise



The right exercise is anything you enjoy that gets your blood pumping. Photo by Elenamuz. Opposite by Poznyakov. Dreamstime.com.

and getting started will help you to build up energy and motivation for next time. You'll need to keep moving for a few weeks before you notice a change. But once you start feeling better, it'll be worth it.

What's the best kind of exercise?

The best kind of exercise is the one you enjoy – the one you want to keep doing. Try a few out and see what works for you. Researchers have

found that, when it's possible, group exercise is better than working out by yourself. Friends keep you company, make exercising fun, and help keep you motivated to continue. But solo exercise still helps your brain. Cycling seems to be the most effective solo exercise for most people, though you may find that jogging or swimming is better for you. Group exercises you can try include: basketball, dance lessons, water polo, hiking, martial arts, rock climbing, speed walking, and any

sport or that gets your blood pumping. Sky's the limit – pick something you love, try something new and exciting, or choose something simple close to home, whichever sounds best to you.

Depression and anxiety are exhausting, and we know exercise sounds hard right now. We also know you are stronger than you feel, and every little bit of movement you can manage will help. Set goals you can reach, and get out there!

How to Get Better Sleep For Healing

Photo by Stangot.
Opposite photo by Nitr.
Dreamstime.com.

Consistent sleep is one of the most powerful tools in your mental health toolbox. Sleep is healing for your body and mind, and better sleep is strongly connected to improving mental health. The problem is that trouble falling or staying asleep are symptoms of both depression and anxiety. You may not feel like sleeping, or you might want to sleep all the time. These are normal symptoms of your depression or anxiety, and making your sleep schedule healthier and more regular will probably help your other symptoms too!

How Much Should I Sleep?

Adults usually need 8-9 hours of sleep a night. There are a few people who need less, but not many. Chances are that if you think

you function "just fine" on six hours of sleep, you're probably in denial. Try a week of 8 hour nights. You just might love it.

What if I Can't Sleep?

You can retrain your brain. Sleep is a habit, and you can change habits over time. Good sleep hygiene is a useful tool that helps your body and mind learn to rest.

What's Sleep Hygiene?

It's a list of things you can do to improve the quality of your sleep. Here are a few:

Find your Rhythm: Wake up and go to sleep at the same time every day - even on weekends. It's not easy at first, but it makes a big difference once your body knows what time to sleep.

If you can't sleep, get out of bed: if it's bedtime, but you just can't sleep, you don't have to toss and turn in bed. It's even better to get up and do something repetitive and calm, like folding socks or reading a relaxing book. Once you feel sleepy, go back

to bed and try to sleep. Keep the lights low while you're awake, and try not to do anything too engaging or stressful. Audiobooks can be helpful, as well.

Skip the Caffeine: Coffee stays in your system a lot longer than most of us realize. Try not to have any coffee, tea, caffeinated soda, or other stimulants like cigarettes for at least 4-6 hours before bed. Even longer is better. Read the note at the bottom of this page to see how long caffeine stays in your system.

Avoid Alcohol: It's also best to stay away from alcohol for at least 4-6 hours before sleeping. Longer is better, and many clinics suggest avoiding alcohol entirely. It may help you fall asleep faster, but it's not as helpful as it seems. Alcohol disrupts sleep quality and might cause you to wake up more in the night.

Save your bed for sleeping: Try to use your bed for only sleeping and sex so your body associates that place with sleep. If you use your bed as a place to watch TV, eat, read, work on your laptop, or pay bills, your brain might start gearing up for those things when you climb into bed.

Try Not to Nap: Naps during the day can make it harder to sleep at bedtime, so stay up all day, if you can. If you do need a nap, keep it shorter than an hour, and finish before 3 PM.

Create a Bedtime Routine: Choose a few things to do each night that remind you it's time to sleep. Try 15 minutes of stretches or breathing, or curl up with a cup of herbal tea. A hot bath might also help, but try to take it an hour or two before bed so your body can cool off before sleeping.

Hide the Clock: Checking the clock over and over can stress you out, and anxiety makes it harder to sleep. Set an alarm to help you wake up, but keep the clock out of sight as much as you can.

Exercise earlier in the day: Regular exercise makes it easier to sleep, but getting active too close to sleepy time might wake your body up. Try to avoid strenuous exercises for at least four hours before bedtime.

What if I Still Can't Sleep? You may have insomnia or a sleep disorder. Try the technique on page 15 and talk to your doctor. Don't give up until you can get your rest.

Another important step for good sleep planning is avoiding coffee later in the day. But how late is too late for a caffeine boost? Is coffee keeping you awake longer than you think?

How long does your coffee stay with you? To answer that question, scientists measure the half-life of caffeine - or number hours after you drink a coffee that half the caffeine is still in your system.

The half-life of caffeine is about 6 hours. That means if you drink 12 ounces of coffee or about 200mg of caffeine at noon, 100mg is still in your system 6 hours later, at 6 PM, and 50mg is still hanging on 12 hours later, at midnight!

Of course, caffeine withdrawals aren't good for sleep either, so if you're



planning to cut back on your coffee consumption, do it gradually:

- Start by cutting out your last dose of caffeine in the day, then cut out the next latest dose.
- Keep working earlier until you aren't drinking caffeinated beverages at all, or at least you're only drinking them in the morning
- One caffeinated beverage in the morning might help you wake up, but you definitely shouldn't have any caffeine after lunch.
- Enjoy the benefits of better, deeper, more healing sleep.



Put Insomnia to Bed With Sleep Consolidation

Lying awake for hours? Waking up in the night? A technique called "sleep consolidation" can help.

If you're practicing good sleep hygiene and still spending lots of time awake in bed, this technique can help you train your brain to rest. Be sure to check with your doctor first, though, to make sure you're not suffering from a sleep disorder that requires medical treatment.

1. Keep track of your sleep for two weeks. (You'll have to look at a clock a lot for this). Write down how many hours you spend asleep in bed, awake in bed, and awake out of bed. Use a worksheet like the template found at [sleepfoundation.org](https://www.sleepfoundation.org), or an app that measures it for you.

2. After two weeks, add up the time you spend actually sleeping each night, and average it out to find your average total sleep time.

3. For the next two weeks, stay in bed for your average sleep time plus 30 minutes. So if you get 4.5 hours of sleep per night, your allowed time in bed is 5 hours.

4. Set a rising time, and always get up at that time, no matter how much you sleep.

5. Set a bedtime. (Five hours before waking up, in our example) and never go to bed early.

6. Do this for two weeks, and then, if you've been able to sleep solidly for most of your allowed time in bed, start going to bed half an hour earlier.

Keep moving your bedtime back by 30 minutes every two weeks until you're getting at least eight hours of sleep per night.

Dim your lights in the evenings to make you sleepy, and turn on lots of bright lights in the morning to help you wake up. Good sleep hygiene is always helpful too. If you still have trouble sleeping, make plans to see your doctor. Sweet dreams!

Photo: Viacheslav
Iacobchuk on
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Finding Your Balance: Achievable Goals

Different tools for different people

Balance, in many areas of life, is essential for mental health. Taking on too many things at once is a recipe for burn-out. Sitting at home all the time is equally hard on your mental health, however. Here are some tips to help you find your middle ground.

Create a routine

A simple routine can help you divide your day into smaller, more manageable pieces. Start small, to avoid overwhelming yourself. Maybe set an approximate wake-up time, or a goal to eat breakfast every morning. A gentle schedule frees you from the exhausting task of figuring out when to do those things each day, and gives you more mental energy for other things. Then, as you are able, gradually add more recovery tools into your daily routine. Use what works for you.

Try something new

Depression, especially, can leave you stuck in a rut. You do the same things over and over because you're tired, and nothing new seems worth the energy. But little by little, as you

feel able, try to step outside your comfort zone. Visit a new museum, try volunteering at a soup kitchen, or join a new group at church. Trying new things creates chemical changes in your brain over time, which can help your depression start to lift.

If you have anxiety, new things can still be a positive experience if you pay attention to your anxiety levels, and take it slowly. If a new activity makes you uncomfortable, do it in small amounts. Try to take a break before your anxiety gets halfway to panic. And get comfortable before taking on more.

Do something that you used to enjoy, especially with friends

Depression can make you feel like nothing is fun anymore. One helpful step is to make time for the things you enjoyed when your depression wasn't as severe. Bonus points if you can do those things with friends you feel comfortable around. And don't worry if you don't have fun the first few times you go out. It will get better with time. Talk to your friends if you feel safe enough. Explain that you might be depressed, but that you

still appreciate being with them. When your friends can include you, depression and all, your depression slips away even faster.

Take on a few responsibilities

Responsibilities can give you structure and a reason to get out of bed, but don't take on so many that you feel stressed out or overwhelmed. If you aren't up to full-time school or work yet, that's ok. You may be able to work part-time, volunteer, or get more involved in a ministry at your church. Accomplishing something and connecting with others helps ground you.

Use only what's helpful to you

There are a lot of suggestions on this list, so if you're feeling overwhelmed, take a deep breath. You don't need to take on all these tools at once, or ever unless you want to. Choose one thing you like and try it.

Depression and anxiety want you to think that it's impossible to accomplish anything, but don't give up. Little by little, those feelings will fade, and with treatment, you can feel better.

Be Gentle With Yourself

- **Introduce one new goal at a time, and give yourself a chance to get used to it.**
- **Try a gentle routine - not so exact that it's stressful, but with set times for a few things like a wake-up and bedtime.**
- **If you try a tool and find it's not helpful, try something else. It might also help to talk with a trusted friend about what didn't work for you and why.**
- **Make time for fun. As your energy allows, make time for things you used to enjoy, and connect with friends or family. Look for people who accept you the way you feel right now.**



Photoscredits clockwise from top left: Malivan, Odua, and Ksenia Gavrashko. Dreamstime.com.



RESOURCES AND RECOVERY TOOLS

Recovery is hard work, but you don't have to take it on alone. Use the links below to get started, and find community to support you as you heal.

Thinking of hurting yourself?

If so, call 1-800-273-8255 or chat online at suicidepreventionlifeline.org. In Canada, call 1-833-456-4566. No matter what's on your mind, you don't have to carry it alone.

Searching for info about sleep habits?

For a sleep diary template, bedtime calculator, and lots more, visit the national sleep foundation online at sleepfoundation.org.

Hoping for exercise inspiration?

Find lots of great info on healthy exercise habits, from the move your way campaign by visiting health.gov/moveyourway.

Interested in self-help resources?

The online therapy website Kelty's Key has a robust collection of no-cost mental health courses: keltyskey.com/self-help. Australia's Centre for Clinical Intervention also has great self-help resources at cci.health.wa.gov.au/en/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself.

Need affordable health care options?

Check out the Health Resources and Services Administration of the US federal government. It has a nationwide directory of clinics that offer low or no-cost healthcare. Search for a clinic at findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/Search_HCC.aspx.

Looking for a therapist or support group?

The registry at findtreatment.samhsa.gov may help you to find you to find therapist. The National Alliance on Mental Illness may guide you to a support group. Find a chapter at nami.org/Find-Your-Local-NAMI.

Hunting for more of these booklets?

There are seven booklets in the NAD Mental Health Series. To read more, please visit OneTeamMentalHealth.org, or write to the address on the back cover.

The topics in this series are:

- 1. Depression** (information about major depressive disorder)
- 2. Anxiety** (information about GAD and other anxiety disorders)
- 3. Suicide/Harm** (tools for those dealing with thoughts of suicide or non-suicidal self-injury)
- 4. Getting Help** (types of treatment and where to find them)
- 5. Recovery Tools** (behavioral strategies you can use to start feeling better)
- 6. Brain Training** (mental strategies to push back against depression and anxiety)
- 7. Staying Healthy** (how to maintain your recovery once you are feeling better)

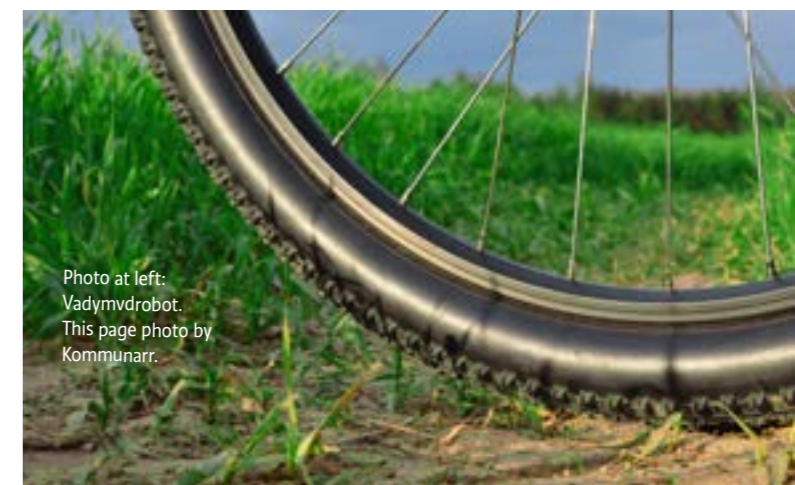


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Jonathan Betlinski, MD; Rachel Scribner, MA; Gary Parks, MDiv

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