

Self-Help Strategies for Depressed Teens

Ways to Empower Your Teen to Feel Better

By Kathryn Rudlin, LCSW | Updated on March 23, 2020

A comprehensive approach to helping depressed teens combines professional therapy and/or medication with self-help strategies. These self-help strategies can help to shift negative patterns and provide your teen with tools they can implement and explore on their own.

Exercise Often

Movement helps combat depression in a variety of ways, including releasing feel-good chemicals into the brain. Participating in physical activity may help improve your teen's mood, and any type of movement can make a difference, whether it's walking the dog, dancing in the shower or skateboarding. Exercise also increases body temperature, which may produce a feeling of calmness, and help take your teen's mind off of their troubles.

Related: [How Physical Exercise Benefits Mental Health](#)

Pay Attention to Nutrition

Food fuels the body and the mind. Some foods tend to make depression worse and some may make it better.

A study published in the journal *Public Health Nutrition* showed that people who habitually ate commercially baked goods and fast food were 51% more likely to develop depression than those who ate little or none.

For teens who thrive on junk food, adding more nutritious foods to their diet often makes a big difference in how they feel. If you need more information about how to implement a healthier

diet, schedule a session with a nutritionist who works with teens, or search for related information in books and online.

Related: [7 Foods That Improve Mood and Fight Depression](#)

Socialize and Find Support

Isolation leads to [loneliness](#), which may lead to increased feelings of depression. Unfortunately, a common symptom of depression in teens is [social withdrawal](#). What often helps is to socialize and stay connected with others. A teen struggling with depression may need peers who will listen and lend their support. Sometimes other depressed teens are in the best position to do this, so consider an online support group specifically for depressed teens.

Just be cautious of too much time spent online. A 2019 study published in the journal of *JAMA Pediatrics* found that for every additional hour young people spend on social media or watching television, the severity of depressive symptoms they experience rises.

Related: [How Social Support Contributes to Mental Health](#)

Vent Feelings

Pent-up feelings and emotions sometimes need to be discharged in healthy ways in order to combat depression. The process of doing so can also help identify some of the negative feelings that often go along with depression. Keep in mind, however, that if this becomes a habit it can ultimately lead to [rumination](#), which can produce a more depressed, unhappy mood.

Healthy ways of venting may include activities such as hitting a punching bag, [journaling](#), singing along to music, or creating art.

Focus on Sleep Patterns

Sleep often plays a role in how a teen feels physically and emotionally. Track your [teen's sleep patterns](#) for a few days to get more information.

The ideal amount of sleep for teens is usually eight hours or more each night—yet only 15% of teens report getting 8½ hours of sleep on school nights, according to the [National Sleep Foundation](#).

In cases where more, or less, sleep is needed, learn about the factors that impact sleep and consult a health professional if needed.

Don't Use Drugs

When a teen doesn't like how they feel or act, sometimes they experiment with [drugs](#), including caffeine, in an effort to cope with their feelings. In most cases, your teen doesn't realize they're self-medicating; they're just looking for ways to try to feel better. Teens who turn to [alcohol and drugs](#) usually make a bad situation worse.

A report from the [White House Office of National Drug Control Policy \(ONDCP\)](#), revealed that marijuana use among teens can worsen depression and lead to serious mental disorders like schizophrenia, anxiety, and even suicide.

If your child is having suicidal thoughts, contact the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at **1-800-273-8255** for support and assistance from a trained counselor. If you or a loved one are in immediate danger, call 911.

For more mental health resources, see our [National Helpline Database](#).

Have Fun

Experiencing joy and happiness in life is important. When depression gets in the way, efforts to focus on fun can make a difference. Try to get your teen to participate in activities that bring a sense of pleasure. Start by having them jot down a list of anything that is fun, silly, or creates a moment of joy, then try to include one of these in each day's activities.

Self-Help Strategies Support Professional Treatment

Self-help strategies are not intended to replace [professional treatment](#) and are best utilized as tools to supplement therapy and/or medication by decreasing symptoms and empowering teens to feel better and more in control of their lives.

Helping your teen implement these strategies will give you a supportive role in your teen's life too.

A Word From Verywell

If you haven't already, make it a priority to set up an appointment for your teen with an adolescent therapist. Mental health issues are usually very treatable, especially when there's emotional support from a mental health professional as well as the teen's family.

Related: [How to Help a Depressed Teen](#)

Article Sources

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1. Sánchez-Villegas A, Toledo E, De Irala J, Ruiz-Canela M, Pla-Vidal J, Martínez-González MA. [Fast-food and commercial baked goods consumption and the risk of depression](#). *Public Health Nutr*. 2012;15(3):424-32. doi:10.1017/S1368980011001856
2. Boers E, Afzali MH, Newton N, Conrod P. [Association of Screen Time and Depression in Adolescence](#). *JAMA Pediatr*. 2019. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2019.1759

Additional Reading

- National Sleep Foundation. [Teens and Sleep](#). Published 2019.