

Dealing with Relapse

Many people have successfully dealt with depression by using good coping skills like those in this

guide, or by using outside help and professional treatment. But sometimes depression comes back. This is called *relapse*.

You can deal with the possibility of relapse in three ways.

I Try to *prevent depression relapse* by using the antidepressant skills described in this guide: we're not saying these skills will always prevent depression, only that they're likely to be helpful. If you know that a situation is coming up, such as an exam, a move or a change in relationships, plan for it. Take things gradually and keep looking after yourself. If something stressful you didn't expect pops up, use realistic thinking, problem solving and goal setting to manage it. Also, make a list of useful strategies from this guide. What kind of realistic things did you say to yourself that worked? What kind of problem-solving choices were most effective? What goals made you feel better and kept you active? Write them down. You may need new strategies for new situations but it's a good idea to start with things that worked before.



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2 Notice the early warning signs of relapse. Pay attention to yourself and your situation. Notice if your mood, or thinking or behavior is changing in a way that you don't like. If you detect those warning signs, respond quickly: talk to others you trust; use the antidepressant skills that worked last time; seek professional help if needed. The crucial thing is to make a plan for responding to these warning signs: we call this an *emergency mood plan*. It's a kind of first aid kit for your mood. Just having such a plan can lessen the chances you'll need it. If you are taking on too much, give yourself a break and 'de-stress'. But remember that keeping active in rewarding ways is good for you. In particular, try to stay involved with people and activities that help you to feel good about yourself.

3 Once a depression is underway, think about what worked for you last time. Was there a particular kind of professional help that was especially useful? Was there a particular antidepressant skill that really made a difference? For example, if it helped you before to 'Exercise 2 times per week', review whether you have been continuing to meet this goal; if not, maybe it's a good place to start. If you've handled depression once you can do it again. In fact, you probably have knowledge, skills and supports that you didn't have the first time. If you've been seeing a counsellor, doctor or mental health professional, contact them, especially if you are having thoughts of harming yourself.

Congratulations!

You've read through the information and skills sections, maybe you've done some writing or filling in the worksheets and maybe you've been trying out these skills in your life. Whatever stage you've reached, you understand depression better. If you keep on learning the antidepressant skills (reading over the skills section, filling in the worksheets and practicing the skills in your life), you will continue to get better at fighting depression.