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Chapter

Getting Motivated to Manage Depression

Low motivation is one of many symptoms of depression. Often a vicious cycle, it is frequently the most problematic symptom of depression because it can cause you to get behind with tasks and activities, isolate you from people, cause you to avoid doing things you used to enjoy, and even cause you to avoid self-care. After weeks or months of falling further and further behind, your to-do list can seem insurmountable, making it even more difficult to get started. Often these tasks create anxiety and not only pile on responsibility, but also pile on more depression. Furthermore, you get out of practice with doing things that used to bring you pleasure, such as engaging in hobbies and spending time with friends. Watching TV, eating poorly, isolating, and the like become the new normal.

Perhaps the most difficult obstacle about having a lack of motivation is that it is difficult to get motivated to do things that will help you get better. However, the fact that you are reading this is a very good sign that you have at least *some* motivation. Even though it may be a bit overwhelming, make a list of the things you used to do that you wish you had the motivation to do now. While making the list, keep in mind that you don't have to do any of these things today. This may include exercise, socializing, housekeeping, ways of dressing, hygiene habits, or engaging in a hobby. It may also include tasks such as paying bills or maintaining your car or house.

My List

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

You probably feel a bit overwhelmed from making that list. Thinking about finding the energy to get back to your prime and do these things can be so overwhelming that it can zap your energy and ultimately even leave you immobile. The most important thing to remember to prevent yourself from feeling too overwhelmed is to take one step at a time.

Shortly, I will ask you to choose one thing to work on. Before you do that, consider that feeling of being on the fence about socializing, exercising, or having sex. Usually when people who are mildly to moderately depressed decide to go out with friends, ride their bike, go for a walk, or make love, they are almost always glad later that they did it and usually enjoy it more than they had predicted. Has this happened to you?

Write down two instances when you engaged in an activity that you almost chose not to do because your motivation or desire to do it was low?

How did you feel while you were doing them?

How did you feel after you did them?

Have there been instances when you have done one of these things and you were sorry you did it?

When you had been on the fence, what percentage of time have you been glad that you did the activity?

_____ %

Before you decide what to do first, how many of the items on your list do you think you might enjoy once you start doing them? Put a check mark next to them.

Now underline the items on the list that you think there is a greater than 50% chance will make you feel better once you have made some progress on them or have accomplished the task.

Now circle just one of the things above that you want to do first. If in doubt, pick one that you both checked and underlined. Alternatively, choose the thing that involves the least effort. Indecisiveness is also common with depression. If you can't decide, definitely choose physical exercise, or, if that is not on your list, choose to socialize. Otherwise choose the first item you circled.

If you chose exercise and you haven't been doing it lately, do not expect to run six miles or spend an hour at the gym. Instead, start with something like a 15–20-minute walk or plan to stay at the gym for 20–30 minutes. Once you're engaged, you may find you stop after you've hit your initial 15–30-minute goal. That's fine! Give yourself credit for getting started. However, you may also find that, once you get started, you want to keep going. By all means, do so. And if 15 minutes seems too long, any exercise is a start and better than nothing!

Consider involving a walking or workout buddy. Or find someone who will play tennis with you or go in-line skating. If you make a commitment to go with someone, you'll be more likely to exercise and then you will be socializing at the same time. It's a win-win! Don't have anyone? Check online to see whether there is a group in your area for an activity that you enjoy.

Socialization is a major part of what brings us happiness. To start, it's probably best to socialize with people who are positive, funny, warm, and supportive. Remember misery loves company, so, because you don't want to remain miserable, avoid being with people who are likely to bring you down. Also, consider what is easiest. For example, if you sometimes meet with friends for coffee nearby and it's casual, that will be easier than planning a dinner with friends who dress up and tend to meet at a less convenient place. For making social plans, "When in doubt, get out!" can be a useful phrase to remember. If you have no one to socialize with, it is recommended that you

see a therapist to help you develop strategies to meet new people and rekindle old friendships, and that will also give you one more person to talk to.

Rather than forcing yourself to do these things, I encourage you to think of it as an experiment. Give these strategies a try to see what happens. If you never exercise and don't particularly enjoy it, I still encourage you to walk or start another exercise program that seems least difficult. Our bodies are meant to move. Unfortunately, modern conveniences and the computer age have led us to be increasingly sedentary, and that certainly contributes to depression and anxiety!

Write down the one thing that you are choosing to do (see Happy You Did It? worksheet):

If you have time to do this thing and it's a solitary activity, put down your book and do it now. Otherwise, schedule it by writing it in your calendar. If it involves another person, contact that person, or people, to schedule it.

If your activity involves others, pick a back-up activity in the event that you have difficulty scheduling. If you're motivated do both!

Once you have done the activity, use the Satisfaction Rating Scale to indicate how much you enjoyed it.

Satisfaction Rating Scale

Rate your level of enjoyment, or how glad you are that you did the activity:

0	1	2	3	4	5
No enjoyment	Almost no enjoyment	OK, but wish I hadn't done it	Some enjoyment; glad I did it	Enjoyed it; glad I did it	Really enjoyed it; very glad I did it

In the days to come, pick at least one activity per day. If you don't actually do it, that's alright. Just consider the possibility of engaging in an enjoyable activity daily. Don't set your expectations too high. In fact, if you haven't engaged in any pleasurable activities for several weeks, even following through with one thing a week is a good start. For each thing that you ponder doing, use the Motivation and Satisfaction Monitoring Form on the next page, as well as the Satisfaction Rating Scale in the previous exercise.

This is a monitoring sheet for exercise, socialization, and sex. If you do not have a partner or you have never really enjoyed sex, you can skip this part and focus on socializing and exercise. You could also add a hobby in place of sex on the monitoring form. Or, if you are already regularly engaging in exercise, social events, and/or sex, you could add hobbies in place of the things you don't feel you need help motivating yourself to do. Exercise, social events, sex, and engaging in a hobby are likely to help you feel better even when you don't feel motivated to do them.

Once you have started getting back into activities that give you pleasure, you can begin to tackle chores or tasks that you want to get crossed off your list, or maybe there are things you want to start doing again, such as cooking. Think about a way to ease into it. For example, if you used to make breakfast daily and want to get back into making breakfast again, start by making toast for a few days, then make toast and eggs, and next you can add bacon.

Remember that “inch by inch it’s a cinch” but “yard by yard it’s hard.” Enacting this plan means to either divide activities into small, easily doable tasks or decide to commit to small time frames. For example, if you are behind on your mail, you could either commit to a small stack (perhaps a quarter or a third of your mail pile) or take 15 minutes to go through your mail. For more information, go to the second half of Chapter 22, on procrastination.

If you found that, most of the time, when you were on the fence about socializing or engaging in something else, you did it, and you enjoyed it, remember that. The next time you are in doubt, go out or otherwise engage. If you are still really struggling with depression and unable to get motivated, your therapist may recommend medication or various alternative approaches. If you aren’t seeing a therapist, you may want to find one, consider medication, or at least look at Therapist Chapter 17 and Therapist Chapter 24.

The remaining chapters are optional. It is unlikely that they all apply to you. The title of each chapter may be enough for you to decide whether it applies to you. If not, the questions at the beginning of the chapters or the first paragraph will help you decide which ones are worth reading.

Motivation and Satisfaction Monitoring

This form is for monitoring your motivation and satisfaction for exercise, socialization, and sex.

Rate your motivation on a 0–5 scale as follows:

0 Can't do it	1 Not motivated; would really have to force myself	2 Easier not to do it	3 On the fence	4 Know I'll feel better so I'll do it	5 Want to do it
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SOCIAL EVENT			EXERCISE		SEX	
Date	Motivation	Satisfaction	Motivation	Satisfaction	Motivation	Satisfaction
1/15	Dinner with Lucy: 2	4	20 min walk: 1	3	2	4