



Get Active Feel Good!

Paul Farrand, Adrian Taylor, Colin Greaves & Claire Pentecost



Helping *yourself*
to get on top of
low mood

WELCOME AND WELL DONE!

Sometimes the hardest steps are the first ones, and by getting this far you have already taken your first step to get on top of your low mood.

This self-help programme, with Case Studies, is here to guide you through your recovery based on an approach that has helped many people already in a similar situation to you. At times you may feel like giving up, but don't worry that is perfectly normal. If you can, use the support of a family member or friend, or maybe your GP, as well as your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner, or PWP for short.

Your PWP is a mental health professional trained to support you to work through this self-help programme. It is likely you will have regular sessions with them to help you identify and solve any problems and answer any questions you may have. The focus is on working together, rather than your PWP simply telling you what you should do. As such they will go at the pace you want to go and really put you in control. Remember you are the expert in how you are feeling. Their expertise is in supporting people as they use this programme.

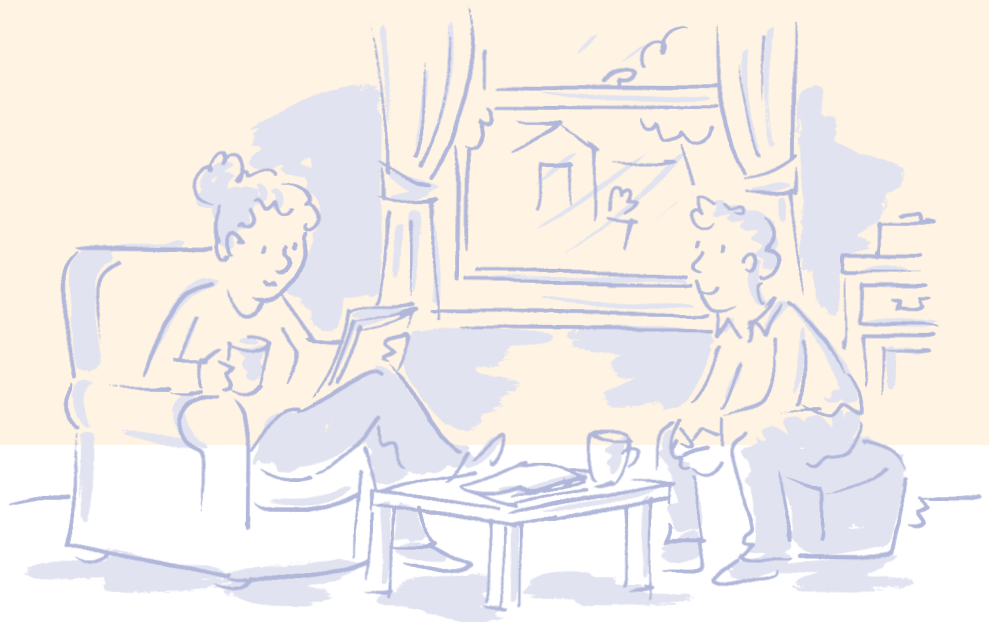
You are going to ask a lot of yourself in working through this programme, and at times you will simply want to give up. However it is likely your PWP has seen this all before and will be able to help you through any difficult times.

There are no expectations about how quickly you should work, nor the amount of time it will take to get better. However, for this programme to be successful we ask you to commit to two things.

- **GIVE THE ACTIVITIES A GO TO SEE WHAT WORKS FOR YOU**
- **STAY IN TOUCH, FACE-TO-FACE OR BY PHONE! LET YOUR PWP KNOW HOW YOU FEEL SO THEY CAN BETTER SUPPORT YOU**

HELPING YOU THROUGH YOUR TREATMENT

Before we get started on helping you to understand low mood and the way it affects you, we would just like to share some tips that may be helpful when using this programme. Most of these tips come from people just like you who we have treated for low mood.



GIVE IT YOUR BEST SHOT

Because you have low mood you may find some things difficult. But just give the programme your best shot. Your PWP is there to help you overcome any difficulties you have and is well aware that sometimes things just seem too much. All anyone will ask of you is just to give it a go.

LIKE EVERYONE, EXPECT TO HAVE GOOD DAYS AND BAD DAYS

Hopefully after using the programme for a few weeks you will notice a gradual improvement in your mood. However, you will also have bad days, and this may affect how you use your programme or engage with the activities. This is all perfectly normal and to be expected.

DON'T OVERDO IT

Whilst treatment will proceed at a rate suitable for you, slow and steady is often the best to aim for. Think about breaking things down into small, manageable chunks – that generally makes things easier. Your PWP will be able to help you with this.

INVOLVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS IF YOU CAN

Like all of us, when you are feeling a little down, you may have found that just having others around can be helpful. They may help you look at things differently, find ways to solve problems or maybe just be there for a chat. Getting others involved isn't for everyone and you may not be ready to take this step yet – don't worry if that is the case. But if you think you might find the support of others helpful and they want to help then why not ask? If you show them this programme, they may find the sections on what low mood is and how it is affecting you helpful.

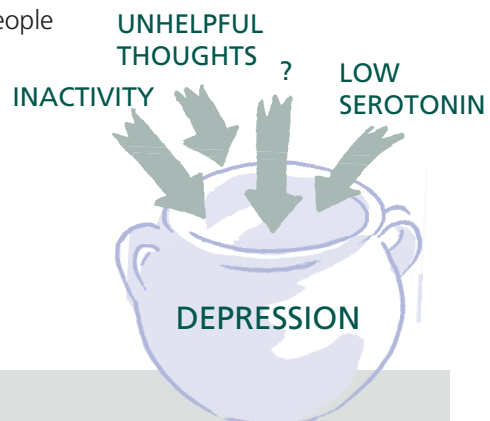
UNDERSTANDING LOW MOOD AND DEPRESSION

Persistent low mood, or as it is often called depression, will affect about one in six people during their lifetime.

Mental health experts are still debating what causes depression and low mood. Some feel it is caused by:

- Low levels of a chemical called serotonin that helps to take signals from one area of the brain to another
- The way we interpret things that happen to us. If you tend to look at things negatively (especially ourselves, our futures and the world around us) or if you tend to jump to negative conclusions, over time this can affect your mood
- A reduction in your normal activities, for whatever reason

Whilst any of these may be true, it is very likely that most people become depressed due to a combination of them. So it may not be easy to pin it down to any one thing.



The Impact of Low Mood?

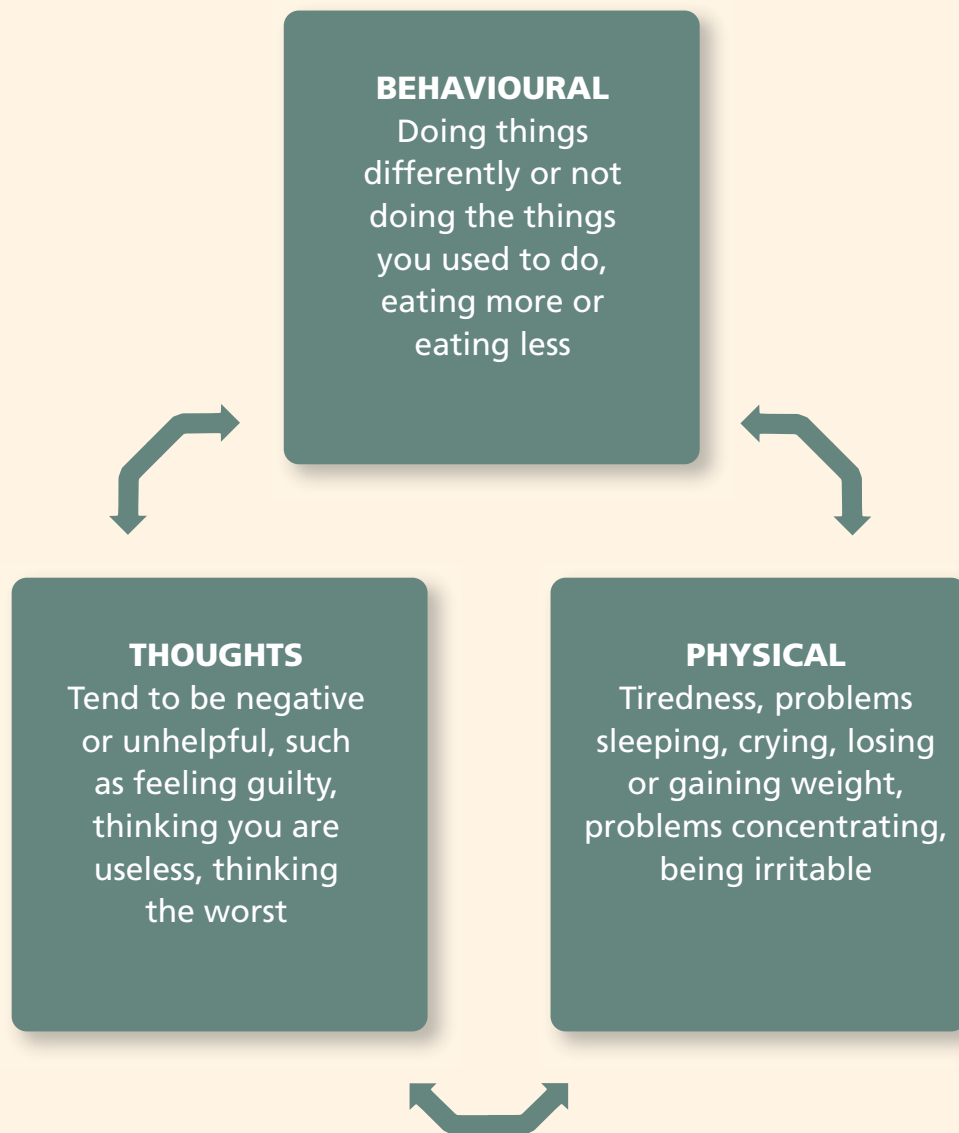
Although everyone will experience depression in their own way, people often say similar things about it.

People with depression often say that depression affects

- a) their behaviour,
- b) the thoughts that go through their head, and
- c) how they physically feel.

One thing leads to another, as we have tried to show in the diagram opposite. You may not be experiencing all these things, but if you have depression you will certainly be experiencing some of them.

The impact of low mood or depression



Depression or low mood impacts upon all three of these areas and one thing leads to another. For example, having unhelpful thoughts can make people feel tired and fatigued which may then stop them from doing the things they want or need to do. Or, problems concentrating can result in thoughts like 'I can't do anything properly anymore' which could result in time off work.

A very important thing about the above diagram is the way that these three areas can reinforce each other. It can become an unhealthy cycle, or a 'downward spiral' that is hard to break out of. These negative effects can spill over into other areas of your life.

HOW IS YOUR DEPRESSION AND LOW MOOD AFFECTING YOU?

People with depression or low mood may also report having a sense that 'they are staring down a black hole, not knowing how to get out'. Before we start to talk about ways in which we can help you get out of this hole, it is worth thinking about how your depression or low mood is affecting you.

Using the diagram opposite think about how your depression or low mood is affecting you. In each of the three boxes write in the type of things you have stopped doing or are doing differently, some of the unhelpful thoughts that commonly go through your head and the way you feel physically. Don't worry if this seems difficult - your PWP will go through this with you.





Behavioural

Write in here the things you have stopped doing or now do differently



Thoughts

Write in here the specific types of unhelpful thoughts that go through your head



Physical

Write in here the physical changes you have noticed



THINKING AHEAD

Hopefully you now know a little more about how your low mood is affecting you. It may therefore be helpful to begin to think about what you would like to get out of your treatment.

Some people with low mood find it difficult to plan ahead but this will be an important part of your treatment. So, it would be useful for you to think about what you may be able to achieve over the next few months. These may be things you have done in the past that you have stopped doing, or new things you would like to achieve.

OK let's get started!

In the 'What do you want to get out of treatment?' boxes opposite, write down three things you are not presently doing but would like to. Then say how well you think you can currently achieve them by circling the appropriate number between 0 and 6 (0 means 'Not at all' and 6 means 'Anytime'). It should be something that you are not able to do at the moment but that you think you can realistically achieve over the coming months. If you are struggling to identify any aims for your treatment, your PWP can help.



What Do You Want to Get Out of Treatment?



Today's Date

Item 1

I can do this now (circle a number):

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all

Occasionally

Often

Anytime

Today's Date

Item 2

I can do this now (circle a number):

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all

Occasionally

Often

Anytime

Today's Date

Item 3

I can do this now (circle a number):

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all

Occasionally

Often

Anytime

BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION : GETTING ACTIVE

Now you have identified some things you would like to achieve by the end of your treatment, it is time to move on and think about 'getting active' to reduce your low mood. The way you will be supported to do this is through something called 'Behavioural Activation'. This is a treatment that is often used to help people with low mood and depression.

Why is Behavioural Activation used for depression and low mood?

- a) Lots of people with low mood have told us how helpful they have found it in improving their low mood.
- b) A lot of research has shown it to be effective.
- c) It does not require you to concentrate for long periods of time or think too much. These are both things that people with depression or low mood often tell us they have problems with.

What will I need to do?

It requires you to increase the things you are doing in three main areas of your life:

- **routine activities**
- **pleasurable activities**
- **necessary activities**

Just thinking about this may seem overwhelming as you are possibly struggling with low energy levels and tiredness. However, the really helpful thing about behavioural activation is that it is done in a way that helps you to start doing things again at a level you choose. You will decide how much you feel you can do.

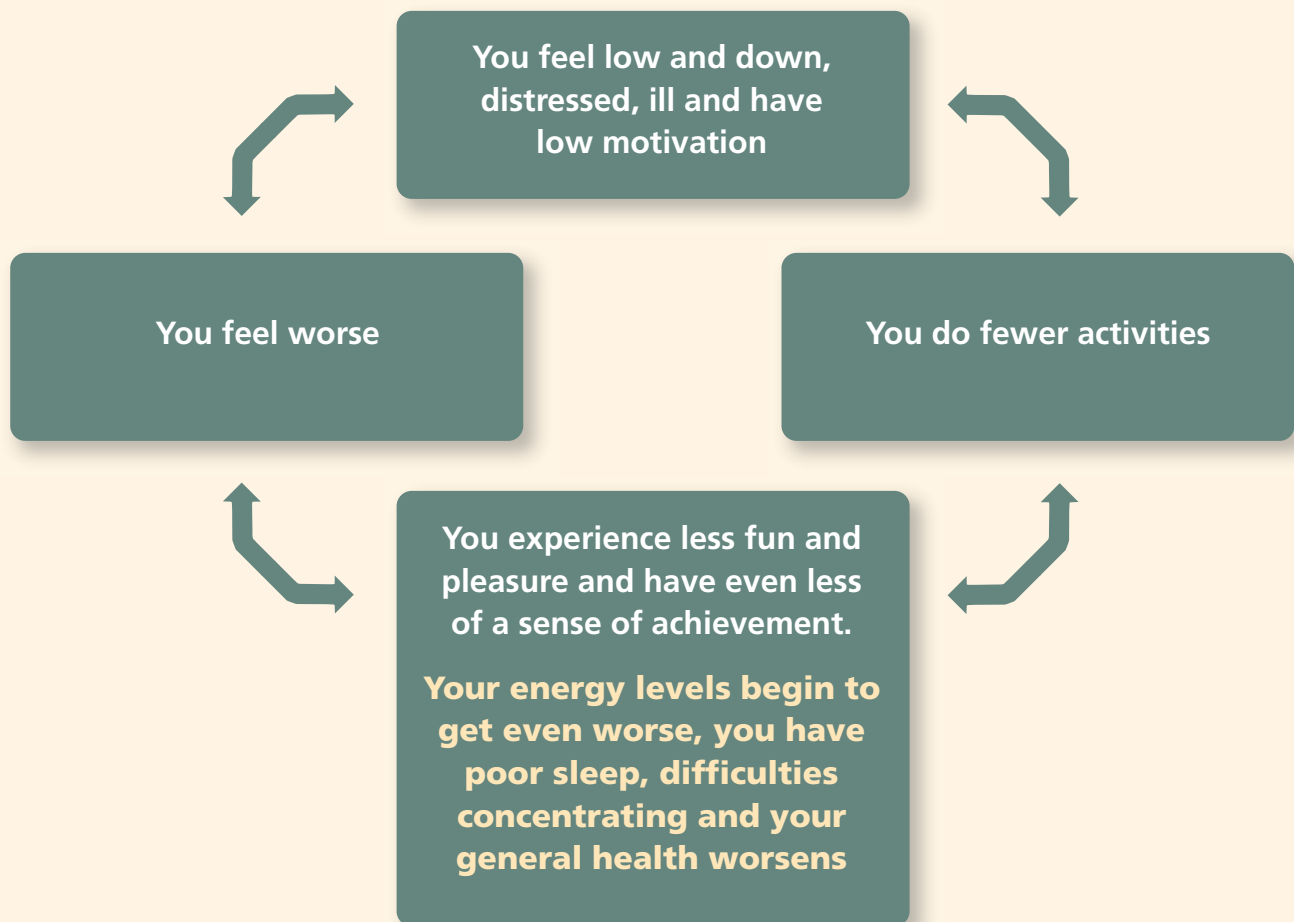
But I am already tired!

By doing more activities you may also notice you slowly start to feel better and your tiredness actually begins to lessen. This may seem a bit odd. But sometimes we do less because we feel tired and less energetic.

So how does it work?

When people are depressed they tend to withdraw from the world in general. They tend to do less of the things they routinely do, things that they find pleasurable, or things that are necessary in life (such as paying the bills or doing the shopping). This might help at first as in the short-term doing less may actually make you feel better – it is a normal 'self defence' type of response. However, doing less in the longer term also means that things that have to be done tend to pile up and you may find yourself doing less of the things you enjoyed. You also have more time to dwell on negative thoughts.

Cycle of low mood and reducing activity



Over time, this lack of activity can make your mood worse rather than better. Then of course, you are likely to want to do even less and this makes you feel even worse – it is a downward spiral (or a black hole as some people describe it).

Behavioural Activation tries to break this cycle by encouraging you to start doing things again – a little at a time. This puts the spiral into reverse and things start to improve. By taking small steps you will start to feel better and have more energy and more confidence to take the next step. Best of all, you are the one who will set the pace, and you are the person who will decide what to do and when.

Getting started with Behavioural Activation

People with depression and low mood often like Behavioural Activation. Have a go to try and work through this yourself, but as ever your PWP is there to help you as well.

STEP 1 : RECORD WHAT YOU ARE CURRENTLY DOING

Use the blank 'My Starting Point Diary' to record what you are currently doing during the week. Start today and record over the next 7 days. There are two boxes each for the morning, afternoon and evening so just try to include the main two things you have done for each.

My Starting Point Diary

		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Morning	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Afternoon	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Evening	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Comments				

It can really help later on if you are able to provide some detail about:

'Where' you are doing it – i.e. 'lounge'

il about:

A stylized illustration of an open notebook with a pen resting on it. The notebook has a light blue cover and white pages. The left page has a few horizontal lines and a small squiggle. The right page has a larger rectangular area with horizontal lines and a small squiggle. The pen is blue and silver. The background is a solid light blue.

STEP 2 : IDENTIFYING ACTIVITIES

Once you have an idea as to what you have done during the previous week it is time to start to think about some of the things you have given up since feeling down. And perhaps to think of some things you would like to start to do for the first time.

Looking at the three things you said that you would like to achieve previously in the 'What Do You Want To Get Out of Treatment' box may help you think about some of the things you want to put in here.

Try to think about activities in three main areas of your life

Routine

These are activities you used to do regularly and can include things such as cooking, cleaning, shopping for food, walking the dog, shaving, washing, having a bath or shower etc.

Pleasurable

These are things you used to enjoy before your low mood or indeed could be new things that you think you would enjoy and like to try. These are very much down to individual choice. What one person enjoys another may really dislike. Only you can really know what these are, however examples may include going out with friends, or going to the park.

Necessary

These are activities that are often very important and for which there is a consequence if they are not done. For example, paying bills, getting an M.O.T. for the car, taking your children to school, ensuring you phone work to let them know how you are getting on or completing a Personal Sickness Certificate if you are off work.

Use 'Worksheet A' on the next page to write down a few activities in each column. You do not have to do this all at once, and may find it helpful to come back to it a few times. At times you may be unsure as to whether the activity is Routine, Pleasurable or Necessary. Don't worry about it – these categories overlap a lot. For example having a bath could fall into any of the categories. Just put the activity where you feel it fits best.

Worksheet A : Identifying activities

Under each type of activity write down what you want to be able to achieve. Please include all activities you can think of here, regardless of whether you think you can do them or not. We will deal with that in Step 3. Again don't worry if you struggle with this step. Anything you get down will be a bonus as your PWP is always there to help.

[illegible]

If you have managed to identify even a few activities in each column then that is great. You can move onto Step 3. If you have had some problems doing this however, your PWP will help.

STEP 3 : ORGANISING ACTIVITIES AS TO HOW DIFFICULT THEY ARE

Step 3 involves using Worksheet B to put the activities in order of how difficult you feel they are.

If some of the activities you have listed in Worksheet A seem too difficult to do straightaway that is fine. Initially you should focus on trying to do the easier ones. Step 3a will help you organise this.

Step 3a

For each of the routine, necessary and pleasurable activities written in Worksheet A, think about how difficult you would find it to do them in the next week or so. If it seems really impossible for you to do one of them at the moment, write them under 'Most difficult'.

If the activities would be really difficult but not impossible write them under 'Medium Difficult' and those you feel you could possibly manage in the next week or so place under 'Least difficult'. It is possible that those you feel are least difficult may still be challenging.

Sometimes people find it difficult to identify any 'Least difficult' activities. A helpful tip is to try and break the activities down.

Look at the activities you have identified as 'Most difficult' or 'Medium difficult'. Can you think of ways you could break these activities down into smaller ones?

For example 'clean the house' could be broken down into a number of smaller activities such as:

- clean the lounge
- clean the kitchen
- clean the bedroom

If this seems too daunting then you could break these down further:

- tidy the lounge
- vacuum the lounge

You could keep going doing this until you had broken the task down to a point that you felt you could manage it, although still presenting you some challenge. When you have done this write the activities under the 'Least difficult' heading.

Step 3b

When you have identified a range of activities under each of the headings, go through each activity you have identified from Most to Least difficult and write these into Worksheet B.



Worksheet B : Organising activities by how difficult they are



STEP 4 : PLANNING

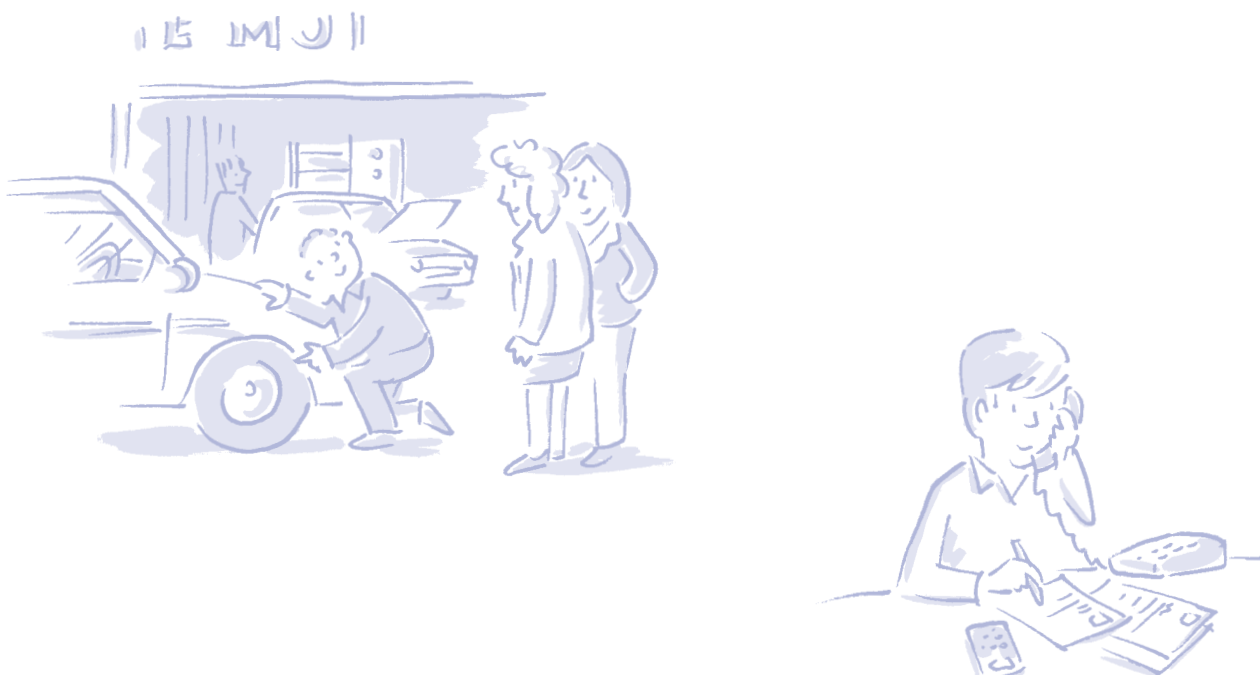
The final stage is to begin to put activities from your 'Least difficult' section into the 'My Next Steps Diary' over the page.

As far as possible, try to include at least one Routine, Pleasurable and Necessary activity from the Least difficult column. However, the number of activities you think you can achieve can only be decided by you.

Sometimes people may feel achieving just two or three to begin with is enough, especially if you have been inactive for a long time. Sometimes people may feel they can achieve more in a week. If you feel like this, great! However be prepared for the possibility that when you come to actually do the activities it may seem harder than you first imagined. If this is the case then it is no problem. Do what you can, and afterwards make a note of the difficulties or what you enjoyed in the Comments section in your 'Next Steps' Diary and discuss these when you next see your PWP.

Important

Although you should try to start off with the 'Least difficult' activities, have a look at your Necessary activities. Necessary activities may also need to be prioritised even if they are under your 'Most difficult' heading, as these may have consequences if they are not done. For example, it may be paying an overdue water bill. If you notice that it needs to be done in the next week then think about ways you could do it. Until you feel better this could involve asking friends or family for help, or if there is time you could raise this at your next meeting with your PWP who could help you to overcome any barriers to getting these done.





Time to put the planned activity into action

When you have managed to write your activities for next week in your diary it's time to start getting active! Use the diary to help you to start doing the things you want to achieve at the times you have indicated. This may or may not be easy. But as long as you try to achieve the activities in your diary you will be making your first steps towards recovery.

See how you get on in the first week. If you have struggled, then try to write down what happened and why it didn't work in the comments box and your PWP will be able to support you. If however you have achieved the activities you set yourself write down why you think it worked then for next week you can start to think about including more activities. Perhaps you could start to include some of the activities that you originally saw as more difficult. If all is well then over time you will notice your diary beginning to fill up once again and you will notice yourself getting back to your regular activities.

A few things to remember however!

Don't expect too much too soon

Some weeks you may find are quite easy to achieve. Other weeks may be a real struggle or you may not achieve the activities you set yourself. This is all perfectly normal and to be expected. But either way is great; whatever happens you and your PWP are learning how best to move forward and you are learning how to steer your way back towards feeling better.

Don't expect to feel better immediately

It can take time to get this ball rolling and you may find that you start to feel you have achieved things before you actually start to experience pleasure, satisfaction or a sense of achievement again. The main thing is just to keep going and the pleasure and sense of achievement will return.

Don't forget you are in control

You should go at the speed you want. No-one is going to put you under any pressure to go quicker than you want to. Also remember you are not alone, your PWP is there to help you throughout.

STEP 4 : PLANNING

Planning activities for the week using My Next Steps Diary.



My Next Steps Diary

		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Morning	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Afternoon	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Evening	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Comments				

There are a few additional helpful tips on planning your activities

- If possible try to plan your activities on different days, spreading them over the week. Do not try to overload yourself on one particular day and have nothing on other days.
- Be as specific as possible when describing your chosen activities. As with the My Starting Point Diary try to include 'What' you are planning to do, 'Where' you are planning to do it and 'Who' you are planning to do it with.

STEP 5 : STAYING WELL

Well done on getting this far.

You have now completed all the steps that can help you feel better and remain well. You have hopefully learned what works best for you and become aware that starting to do things again helps you keep on top of low mood and depression and can prevent any future dips in your mood.

You may have rediscovered past activities you are enjoying again, or have discovered new ones. Perhaps you have found new freedom to do the things you always wanted to do. Either way to stay well it is important to keep up the good work and carry on doing the routine, pleasurable and necessary activities you have started to do again.

Keeping an eye on your mood

It is however perfectly normal to feel a little down at times. Everyone does and it will be no different for you! Next time you feel down therefore do not get too concerned too quickly. However it is worth keeping an eye on your mood just to ensure it does improve on its own.

Developing a low mood alarm and activity toolkit

To do this it is worth reminding yourself again about the main signs that may indicate your depression is returning. Think back to the time when you were last depressed. Then use the 'Low Mood Alarm' to write the main signs in each box that could indicate your low mood has returned. Also write in the activities that you felt really helped lift your mood. Even now you may have stopped doing some of these. This then becomes your personal alarm that your low mood may be returning and your personal activity toolkit to try and help lift your mood once again.

My low mood alarm and activity toolkit

Last time I was depressed I did the following things differently or stopped doing them altogether...

Last time I was depressed the following unhelpful thoughts ran through my head...

Last time I was depressed I felt the following physical symptoms...

Last time I was depressed, doing the following activities really helped...

Remember: Simply experiencing any of these symptoms for a short time will be perfectly normal. However if you find yourself experiencing them for a while and it is beginning to have an impact on your life again then you may need to do something about it.



Using your Toolkit

It will no doubt be distressing if you feel your low mood has returned. However if you notice this then the first thing to do is to try and start doing those activities again you felt really helped last time.

It may be that working through 'Get Active, Feel Good' again could also be helpful. It worked last time so can do so again. And you can always make contact with your depression service if you feel you need extra support.

Just by doing the routine, pleasurable and necessary activities you have started to do again and keeping structure in your life however there is every chance you will keep on top of your low mood.

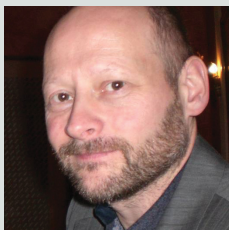
ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr Paul Farrand is a Senior Lecturer within the Mood Disorders Centre and Director of Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner training within Clinical Education, Development and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Exeter. His main clinical and research interests are in the area of low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), especially in a self-help format. Based upon his research and clinical practice he has developed a wide range of written self-help treatments for depression and anxiety.



Professor Adrian Taylor specialises in developing and evaluating interventions and support for health behaviour change as a way of improving and regulating psychological well-being. As one of the Directors of Research in the College of Life and Environmental Sciences at the University of Exeter, he has led and supported many nationally and internationally renowned research studies. His work has featured in a variety of clinical guidelines for helping people to gain control over various health behaviours as well as mood.



Dr Colin Greaves is a health psychologist and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Exeter Medical School. He has research expertise in developing and testing interventions to help people undertake lifestyle change. Based upon his research he has developed an intervention to help people with asthma manage their condition, several weight loss interventions and a self-help manual for people with heart failure.



Dr Claire Pentecost is a Research Associate at the Mood Disorders Centre, University of Exeter. Her research experience is in designing and delivering programmes for lifestyle change for people with diabetes, depression and other long-term conditions. Claire's most recent research looked at the reasons why some people do, and some people do not take up lifestyle change courses recommended by a GP.

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