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# Overcoming Depression

FOR  
**DUMMIES®**

## **Learn to:**

- Recognise the symptoms of depression
- Put cognitive therapy to good use
- Choose the treatment that will work best for you
- Find the right professional help

**Elaine Iljon Foreman, MSc**  
*Consultant Chartered Clinical Psychologist*

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*Clinical Psychologists*





*Overcoming  
Depression*

FOR

**DUMMIES<sup>®</sup>**



***Overcoming  
Depression***  
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**DUMMIES®**

**by Elaine Iljon Foreman, MSc, AFPBSs,  
Charles H. Elliott, PhD,  
and Laura L. Smith, PhD**

**Foreword by Professor Mark Williams**  
Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford



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Further information on the Freedom to Fly<sup>ä</sup> organisation can be found by visiting [www.freedomtofly.biz](http://www.freedomtofly.biz). The Service Brochure detailing the range of services including workshops and psychological therapy can be obtained by emailing [elaine@freedomtofly.biz](mailto:elaine@freedomtofly.biz).

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# *Dedication*

From Elaine: This book is dedicated to Helga and Nickie Iljon, and to Miriam Skelker, for always being there for me.

From Laura and Charles: We dedicate this book to our family: Alli, Brian, Nathan, Sara, and Trevor. And to our parents: William Thomas Smith (1914–1999), Edna Louise Smith, Joe Bond Elliott, and Suzanne Wieder Elliott.

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Working with Depression brings to mind elements of the fight of Good against Evil, reminiscent of J.K. Rowling's view. Seeing depression as the loss of hope, she tells how its been her enemy. Depressions revealed as the underlying basis for her depiction of the Dementors, who suck all the joy and hope out of those they attack. Imagine a future in which you will never, ever be happy again. No hope. Emotionally destroyed and dead. An evil time, indeed.

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# Foreword

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**H**ave you ever had a tune playing over in your mind that you couldn't get rid of? No matter how hard you tried, it kept coming back? Now imagine that what's going round and round in your head is not a tune, but a thought such as: I'm no good, I'm a failure; people would be better off without me. Very soon, you'd feel under attack, exhausted by trying to fight it off. You'd find you couldn't concentrate on anything else. You'd feel guilty and totally defeated, uninterested in life, and unresponsive to your family and friends' attempts to get you to feel better.

If you have felt like this, you'll know the agony of such mental pain. You're not alone. This is depression, and it affects 5 per cent of the population at any one time. It seems to be becoming more common. Fifty years ago, people were most likely to suffer their first major episode of depression in late middle age. Now we find serious depression can strike much earlier: in late teenage and early adulthood. What is more, once a person has been depressed once, there is a risk of the depression returning in the next few months or years, even after a period when it seems to have gone away for good.

What can we do about it? Years ago, it was thought that there were only two approaches to dealing with depression: antidepressant pills, or long-term analytic psychotherapy. But over the last thirty years things have changed.

First, there is a larger range of medication available to choose from, and the pills have become kinder, with fewer side-effects.

Second, there has been a revolution in psychological treatment. Newer, briefer 'talking therapies' such as cognitive and behavioural therapies have been developed. They've been found to be as effective as medication. What's more, the effects of these new psychological treatments last; they prevent you becoming depressed again long after you have stopped coming to therapy.

This book provides a much-needed map to these new ways of approaching depression. Written by experts for everyone, it gives you an excellent guide to the most up-to-date approaches to depression and shows how you can weave your own therapy. Drawing on the latest research, the authors act as trusted guides: with gentleness and good humour, they take us by the hand and explain without preaching, guide without forcing.

This book can be read, but, more importantly, it can also be used.

It offers you a new way to think about yourself, other people and the world around you. It offers many alternatives to fighting endlessly with the thoughts that go round in the head. It offers freedom.

Mark Williams, Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Oxford.

Author of *The Mindful Way Through Depression*

# Introduction

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**W**orld-wide research shows that the number of people suffering from depression is increasing alarmingly. Depression is now so common that one in five people suffer from it at some point in their lives. Yet depression's still stigmatised, with sufferers often afraid to tell families and friends, let alone their employer.

Everyone gets overwhelmed sometimes, but when you descend into depression, the level of misery can feel unprecedented. It can take an inordinate effort to admit to the problem and accept help. But if you choose to admit you have depression and try to combat it, we trust you'll be amazed by the level of support you receive.

Of course, the million-dollar question is 'What can I do about depression?'. Thankfully, this book shows you that the answer is . . . LOADS!

## About This Book

We have two primary goals in writing this book. First, we want you to understand the nature of depression. Understanding depression makes the idea of dealing with it less frightening. Second, we present what you're probably most interested in discovering – how to overcome your depression or help someone you care about who has depression.

We leave no stone unturned in our quest to bring you every possible means for battling depression. We draw strategies for defeating depression from the fields of medicine and psychotherapy. We tell you about the newest arsenal of medications that can combat depression. We show you how focusing on your overall health with exercise and nutrition can pay off. Plus, we extract elements from the psychotherapeutic approaches that have stood up to the tests of rigorous research and been verified as highly effective treatments for depression. These approaches include:

- ✓ Behaviour therapy
- ✓ Cognitive therapy
- ✓ Interpersonal and relationship therapy

Then we go one step further. We turn to the new field of positive psychology for ideas on navigating your way from feeling *good* again to feeling *even better*. We want you to make your life more joyful and more meaningful.

*Overcoming Depression For Dummies* offers you the best advice available based on scientific research. We believe that, if you practise the techniques and strategies we provide in this book, you'll very likely feel better. For many people, this book may be a complete guide for defeating mild to moderate depression. Numerous studies show that self-help often works.

However, depression frequently needs more care and attention than you can receive through self-help. If your depression significantly hinders your ability to work or play, you need to get professional help. No book can completely replace therapy. Start by seeing your family doctor. If you're seeing a therapist or counsellor, you may find that *Overcoming Depression For Dummies* can help augment your therapy. Be sure to discuss that possibility with your therapist. Depression can be conquered; please don't give up.

## *A Note to Our Depressed Readers*

We're keenly aware of the pain and profound despair you may be experiencing. Your sense of humour is probably depleted. With this book, we attempt to lighten a sombre subject with titbits of humour. Some of you may take offence with our attempts or even feel diminished or discounted by this decision. We can understand that reaction. At the same time, your long-term goals need to include rediscovering laughter. Thus, we hope you can try to take our occasional use of wit in the manner we intend it – as another way to help you lift yourself out of the fog of depression.

In addition, we realise that the title *Overcoming Depression For Dummies* may seem offensive to some, especially because when people are depressed, they're prone to make negative, personalised interpretations (see Part II for more information on this topic). However, we assure you that the content of this book is as serious and in-depth as any book on depression. The *For Dummies* format simply enables us to present important material in easily digestible segments. We leave it up to you to determine whether we succeed in doing so.

## *Conventions Used in This Book*

In this book, we avoid the use of professional jargon as much as possible. When we occasionally find it necessary to use a technical term, we pop it in *italics* so that you can easily spot it, and then we clearly define that term. In addition, recognising that there are a number of useful resources available on the Internet, we put web addresses in `monofont`.

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We also include numerous stories to illustrate the information and techniques we present. The people you read about aren't real; however, they represent composites of the many wonderful people we've known and worked with over the years. We use an Anecdote icon to indicate where these stories appear in the text.

Finally, if you're reading this book because you want help in defeating your own depression, we recommend that you purchase a notebook. Use that notebook to write out the exercises we present throughout the book. We call these exercises Antidepressant Tools and highlight them with an icon. Use your notebook often and reread what you've written from time to time.

## *Foolish Assumptions*

Who'd want to read this book? We assume, perhaps foolishly, that you or someone you care about suffers from depression. We also figure that you want to banish depression from your life. Finally, we imagine that you're curious about a variety of helpful strategies that can fit your lifestyle and personality. If these descriptions strike a chord, then this book is for you.

## *How This Book Is Organised*

We organise *Overcoming Depression For Dummies* into 7 parts and 22 chapters. Here's a little about each part.

### *Part 1: Discovering Depression and Designing Defences*

Chapter 1 explores the costs of depression in economic, social, and emotional terms. We describe what depression looks like in various people. Finally, we provide an overview of the best means for treating depression. In Chapter 2, we cover the difference between the various forms of depression. Furthermore, we explain the difference between grief and depression. Chapter 3 shows you how to find the motivation for taking charge of your own depression. And Chapter 4 tells you how to find and get professional help.

## ***Part II: Seeing Things More Clearly: Cognitive Therapy***

More studies support the value of thought therapy (*cognitive therapy*) for the treatment of depression than any other psychotherapy. Part II shows you how certain habitual ways of thinking can be a major contributor to depression. The chapters in this part combine to give you a large toolbox of techniques for changing these dark, distorted thoughts into realistic appraisals of yourself, your world, and your future. You can see that this transformation isn't based on rationalisation or self-deception. Rather, you discover how to subject your thoughts to reasoned scrutiny based on logic and evidence.

## ***Part III: Actively Combating Depression: Behaviour Therapy***

When you feel overwhelmed by depression, you likely find yourself disengaging from everyday life. You start doing less and less as you put off tackling even slightly disagreeable tasks. Of greater concern, previously enjoyable activities seem dull, bland, and devoid of pleasure. Part III shows you how to short-circuit 'do-nothingism' and slowly regain confidence and joy. We give you a mental boost to get moving again through exercise and rediscovering healthy pleasures.

## ***Part IV: Adjusting to Changing Relationships***

Clinical trials of interpersonal therapy demonstrate the value of addressing the relationship side of depression. Depression has a way of disrupting relationships with friends, family, partners, and other loved ones. And relationship problems can worsen depression. Part IV extracts crucial elements from interpersonal therapy and provides additional ideas for handling relationship difficulties that can increase depression. We cover issues such as communicating in healthy ways and coping with loss and grief.

## ***Part V: Full-Bodied Assault: Biological Therapies to Fight the Physical Foe***

Pharmaceutical companies have invested billions of dollars into developing a wide range of antidepressant medications. We review these medications,

from the earliest to the most recent, and give you important information regarding their effectiveness and side effects. We also give you some tools for helping make the decision as to whether or not medications make sense for you and your depression. Finally, we explore the role of herbs, supplements, and nutrition in alleviating depression and review a few alternative treatments for depression, such as light therapy.

## ***Part VI: Life After Depression***

We have every reason to believe that the information in the first five parts, perhaps in conjunction with professional help, will lift you out of your depression. But what do you do next? Part VI tells you how to deal with possible relapses in the future. We tell you how to reduce the likelihood of such slips and how to deal with them if they do occur. Next, we discuss a new approach called *mindful acceptance* that has recently been found to be very helpful for reducing depression relapse.

We then turn to the field of positive psychology for ideas on how to further enhance your life. We want you to feel better than good again, so we lay out strategies for enhancing your sense of well-being through a sense of purpose and connectedness.

## ***Part VII: The Part of Tens***

If you want quick ideas on how to deal with a low mood, you can find them here. Then we show you ten ways to help your kids if they get depressed. We conclude with ten ways to help a friend or partner overcome depression.

## ***Icons Used in This Book***

Throughout this book, we use icons in the margins to quickly point out different types of information. Here are the icons you'll see and a few words about what they mean.



Helpful stories and case-studies about people we've known and worked with over the years.



This icon alerts you to an exercise you can use to hammer away at or discover more about your depression.



As the name of this icon implies, we don't want you to forget the information that accompanies it.



This icon emphasises pieces of practical information or bits of insight that you can put to work.



This icon appears when you need to be careful or seek professional help.



This piece of art alerts you to information that you may find interesting, but skipping it won't put you at a disadvantage in the battle against depression.

## *Where to Go from Here*

Most books are written so that you have to start on page one and read straight through. But we wrote *Overcoming Depression For Dummies* so that you can use the detailed Table of Contents to pick and choose what you want to read based on your individual interests. Don't worry too much about reading chapters and parts in any particular order. Read whatever chapters apply to your situation. However, we suggest that you at least skim Part I, because it contains a variety of fascinating facts as well as important ideas for getting started.

In addition, the more severe your depression, the more we urge you to start with Chapter 3 and continue with Part III. These chapters contain a variety of ways for overcoming the powerful inertia that keeps severely depressed people from taking action. After you read those chapters, feel free to continue picking and choosing what you want to read.