



National Alliance on Mental Illness

page printed from <http://www.nami.org/>

(800) 950-NAMI; info@nami.org

©2013

Tips and Tricks for Dealing with Mental Health Issues

Everyone experiences bumps in the road now and again. Living with a mental health condition can make life particularly hard at times. Although recovery is certainly possible for nearly everyone, even in recovery, you may not always feel your very best. It's important to maintain your sense of self, to focus on your strengths and find something meaningful to live for.

There are likely times when you will feel down, frustrated, disempowered, hopeless or sad. This is okay—just remember that each time you have a setback, you also have the knowledge gained from past experiences and various skills and strategies, to help you feel stronger and to give you hope that how you feel will pass.

Although you may not always be able to control how your head is working on a particular day, you can certainly control the steps you can take to feel better about yourself and life during the good times and the bad.

Check out some of these tips shared by young adults on their strategies for finding their “inner strength” on difficult days.

- Be patient. Problems often cannot be solved in a day. Confucius once said that, “a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.” Every little step you take toward solving a problem and feeling better matters and should be celebrated!
- Take time to focus on you and what you need to feel stronger. You are your greatest ally, so love and take care of yourself. Make a list of your positive qualities and things you have accomplished. If you are having trouble, ask a friend or family member to help. Review this list when your confidence dips or you are feeling down.
- Stay active. Regular exercise and healthy eating have been shown to improve mood and self-image. For tips on exercise and healthy eating, visit the Exercising and Healthy Living tip sheet in the Taking Charge resource group.
- Have fun and be silly. Watch funny movies, attend comedy shows, act silly and play games. It's okay to sometimes let loose, be spontaneous and embrace your inner child.
- Get enough sleep. You need at least eight hours of sleep every night. If you are having trouble sleeping, try the following:
 - Read a book.
 - Listen to soothing music.
 - Drink a glass of warm milk or Sleepytime tea.
 - Avoid caffeine, strenuous activity and heavy meals right before bed.
- Develop a daily or weekly routine and keep track of your activities on a chart or in a notebook. It's important to establish a routine that includes pleasurable and positive activities.
- If you are having negative thoughts or obsessing over something, it helps to envision a large, thick metal door closing on those thoughts. This image can help shut out thoughts you do not want to have and frees up your mind for more positive, productive thoughts.
- Smile. You may have to fake it, but you may find that just your attempt turns a fake smile into a real one. You may be surprised at how putting out positive energy and vibes often has a

boomerang effect.

- Do what you like to do. Spend time every day, even if just for a bit of time, engaging in leisure activities that you enjoy and that make you feel good about yourself. This can include taking a walk, eating chocolate, listening to music, reading or watching your favorite movies.
- Volunteer in your community. Helping others can help improve your self-confidence. For volunteer opportunities in your community, visit www.servenet.com.
- Learn something new. You can take lessons in cooking, photography or playing an instrument. Learning something new often feels good and energizes the brain.
- Perform mindfulness activities that focus on the present, including your breathing and one or all of your five senses. Such activities can include breathing through a straw, eating a jelly bean and guessing its flavor, touching different textures, focusing on an object, etc.
- Attend a peer support group to receive encouragement, support and guidance. This is also a great way to meet new people who may understand what you are going through. To find a support group in your community, contact your local **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) affiliate** or another mental health advocacy organization in your state.
- Share your personal story with trusted friends. Sharing your story with others can help you to better understand yourself and your experiences. If you are not comfortable sharing your story with others, write it in a journal or record it.
- Find ways to express yourself. Write, paint, scribble, dance or draw about how you feel or how you would like to feel. Sometimes the best way to get rid of negative energy is to release it through creative expression. Expressing yourself may also let you better understand or perceive your world. To share your work, see other people's work and respond to creative prompts, visit the Express Yourself resource section on StrengthofUs.org.
- Do something out of your usual pattern to open up new creative approaches to life. Step out of your comfort zone.
- If you are having trouble solving a problem, step away for a bit and focus on something else. Sometimes in taking a break, you discover a solution.
- Think about your dreams and aspirations. Brainstorm short and long-term goals that will help you achieve your aspirations and dreams. Pick one goal and develop an action plan to reach it. For guidance on setting and achieving goals see the **Setting and Achieving Goals tip sheet** and the **Setting Goals Work Sheet** included on the **Taking Charge** resource section on StrengthofUs.org.
- Find a mentor who can provide guidance and encouragement to you to achieve your dreams.
- Prepare some meals for the freezer so you have healthy meals for days when you may not feel like cooking or going out.
- Spend time in nature to relax and reflect. Enjoy being in the present moment and admiring nature's beauty.
- Practice relaxation techniques like yoga, massage therapy, meditation, breathing exercises and related activities.
- Track your mood daily to help see patterns, which can indicate when to take action if you are not doing well or to celebrate when you are! Access the **Tracking Your Mood file** available in the **Taking Charge** resource section on StrengthofUs.org to help you get started on tracking your mood
- Fill a notebook with inspirational sayings, poems, faith-based material, jokes, funny photos and other things that you can look through for inspiration and strength. Ideally these items will also help you to smile.
- Celebrate successes and positive experiences. It is easy to get caught up in a pattern of complaining and dwelling on bad experiences. Take time to focus on the positive moments in life and on celebrating them with friends and family. Remember all that you are grateful for, even the tiny things

- Get out of the house. Take a friend or go by yourself to the mall, for a walk, to the movies or to a sporting event. Stay active and involved in your community.
- Treat yourself to something special. Save your money and finally buy that item you have been eyeing.
- Find a celebrity or famous person that has overcome some of the challenges you may be experiencing. That person may help motivate you to find your strength.
- Adopt an animal to take care of and love. Just petting an animal reduces stress and lowers blood pressure. Also, having a pet that relies on you helps you combat depression, get out of bed and remain active. If you cannot have a pet, visit the humane society to dog walk or to volunteer or offer to pet sit for a friend.
- Remember that it is okay to ask for help. You may feel embarrassed or ashamed, but asking for help shows you care about and value your health and well-being.
- Surround yourself with supportive friends and family who will remind you how great you are and will listen to you when you need to talk.
- Have self-affirmations to repeat daily. Affirmations are positive thoughts and statements to counteract negative ones. Affirmations can include: "I love myself unconditionally," "I can do it," "I am a good, loving person," "I deserve the very best," "There is no need for perfection, my best is good enough" and "This too will pass."
- Be an advocate. Stand up for yourself and others by educating people about the realities of living with a mental health condition. Write to your Congressional Representatives about what matters most to you. Learn more about self-advocacy and legislative advocacy in the **Taking Charge** resource section on **StrengthofUs.org**.
- Set an alarm to go off several times a day. When it goes off, think of something good about yourself or repeat an affirmation. Tools like the MotivAider (see www.habitchange.com) can help with this.
- Have friends and family write letters to you that include what they love about you. Re-read these letters when you are feeling down.
- Educate yourself about your mental health condition and the treatment you receive. Knowing as much as you can will help you understand what to expect from treatment. Knowledge is power. Learn more about mental illness and treatment interventions on the Educate Yourself resource group
- Compile lists of what makes your life worth living, things that make you feel good about being you, things you enjoy most and things that make you feel better.
- Challenge negative self-talk. Ask your health care provider to help you change negative self-talk by thinking about yourself more positively. Also visit the **Building Self Esteem for Healthy Relationships: A Self-Help Guide** in the **Relationships** resource group for more information about negative self-talk.
- If you are hearing voices, put a rubber band around your wrist and snap it each time the voices start. Some research has shown this action can decrease the intensity or frequency of voices. Listening to music also helps reduce voices.
- Read books that help you with recovery. Books recommended by young adults include:
 - Love: What Life is All About by Leo Buscaglia
 - Looking Out for Number One by Robert Ringer
 - Mind Over Mood by Dennis Greenberger, Ph.D.
 - Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway by Susan Jeffers, Ph.D.
 - The Feeling Good Handbook by David Burns, M.D.
 - The Depression Workbook: A Guide for Living with Depression and Manic Depression, Second Edition by Mary Ellen Copeland.
- Repeat negative thoughts you have out loud. Sometimes the act of saying your thoughts out loud empowers you by getting them out of your head and helping you identify irrational beliefs.

- If you are feeling angry or frustrated, flatten aluminum cans for recycling, stomp your feet, rip up paper, hit a punching bag, scream into a pillow or throw a pillow against a wall.
- Squeeze a stress ball, handful of clay or Play-Doh.
- Light sweet-smelling incense or candles to calm and relax you.
- Yell or sing at the top of your lungs to feel more alive and release pent up emotions.

[Back](#)