

Wellness Book

Tips for and by Individuals with
Depression or Bipolar Disorder

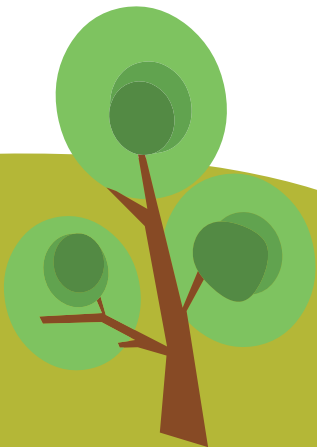
*Mental health ... is not a destination,
but a process. It's about how you drive,
not where you're going.*

– Noam Shpancer

While there's no one recipe for wellness, it can help to know what's working for others. The DBSA Facing Us Clubhouse Wellness Book, created in honor of Mental Illness Awareness Week 2014, houses tips and advice submitted by individuals with depression or bipolar disorder on FacingUs.org. DBSA offers our sincere thanks to all who shared their insights and lived experience. We hope this book will be a source of fresh inspiration to you, the reader.

About The Facing Us Clubhouse

The Facing Us Clubhouse, brought to you by the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, is an online home for anyone seeking inspiration and support for a life of health and well-being. Visit FacingUs.org to learn more.



Turn the page and be inspired by your peers.

ANXIETY

BEING BRAVE

A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

REFRAMING

Change the way you look at things and the things you look at will begin to change
—adapted from Dr. Colbert's Book, *Stress Less*

BREATHE

I learned something very simple and valuable in massage therapy school. Breathe. When we feel down or anxious our thoughts tend to be out of control. Stop, sit up, close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. You can slowly count the seconds as you breathe in and out (i.e. 1-10) or you can chant or hum. It's a great way to calm yourself and it's good for you! Do it as long as you feel the need.

SHORT BUT SWEET FOR ANXIETY

Chew gum. It doesn't necessarily calm, but it gives that part of the body something to do, and for some reason, one may be able to focus somewhat on something else when chewing gum. Sounds strange, but try it!

OVERCOMING ANXIETY

Whenever I feel uncomfortable in any situation, I stop and ask myself 'how am I feeling right now?'. I let myself know that I am there for me.

15-MINUTE 'WORRY' TIME

One hour before bedtime each night, find a quiet place where no one will disturb you, and just worry. Release the worry from your mind. If it helps, write down the worries and hide them somewhere or burn them. By bedtime, I usually don't have anything left to worry about and I feel much better. Do it every night if you have to.

SITUATIONS

Stay in the situation if experiencing anxiety instead of leaving the situation. Take deep breaths to help calm yourself down.

GROUNDING TO HELP ANXIETY

My therapist taught me this grounding technique for when I'm feeling anxious: Think of 5 things in the moment that you can hear, think of 5 things in the moment you can see and think of 5 things in the moment that you can feel. I find this helps me clear my mind and relax. Even these few moments of not worrying are great.

BIPOLAR DISORDER

LIVE FOR TODAY AND MAKE HEALTHY PLANS FOR TOMORROW

Live just for this day. Forget yesterday's challenges—you have surpassed them—and plan healthy choices for tomorrow, but don't go any further looking forward or you will lose sight of today's blessings.

SWEAT THE BIG THINGS NOT THE SMALL

Consider the difference in which is bigger problem at hand and try to resolve it to the best of your ability. The small things are like little bumps in the road that even out but can be handled daily more effectively than the larger problem.

MENTAL CARE

I find that my day always goes better if I take the time to write in my journal, hopefully in the morning when the day is about to begin; but even later is okay too. As long as I can gather my thoughts enough to write something, I always feel better.

THE ESSENCE OF A NEW DAY

"This is the beginning of a new day. You have been given this day to use as you will. You can waste it or use it for good. What you do today is important because you are exchanging a day of your life for it. When tomorrow comes, this day will be gone forever; in its place is something that you have left behind... let it be something good."

DRAGONS

Perhaps all the dragons in our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us act, just once, with beauty and courage. Perhaps everything that frightens us is, in its deepest essence, something helpless that wants our love.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

NOT LETTING MY MOOD DICTATE MY DAY

I am only miserable if I choose to be. Today I choose not to be miserable. I will do my puzzle, I will read a book, I will go for a walk, and I will do something that will take my mind off of being depressed, having a "bad day". Being miserable does not only affect me but others around me too.

HOBBIES

A good way to distract ourselves when we are overwhelmed is to step away and focus on a hobby. Like painting, crochet, knitting, or drawing. Even reading and gaming can help as long as the books and games do not contain triggers.

TEMPORARY

At times it seems like there is no end to this cycle. The constant battle to stay balanced, focused and appear 'normal', literally drains my life force. Complaining that this is exhausting is an understatement indeed. When I am finally able to ground and center my thoughts, I remind myself that this is in fact uncomfortable but temporary!

IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

It's not your fault, but it IS your challenge:

- Get back to calm
- Act honorably

IT'S OK

It's ok to be scared, hurt and show other emotions. To keep them bottled up is unhealthy. Just be careful of who you share your innermost feelings with—they can be used against you.

CLINICAL APPOINTMENTS

KEEPING APPOINTMENTS

In keeping appointments, I have put a calendar in the bathroom across from the toilet so I see it several times a day. I have my appointments written on it in permanent marker.

TELL THEM

Psychiatrists are there for more than just the appointment times. If something is not working, call them up and say so.

PRESCRIBING PSYCHOLOGISTS

In my DBSA group, I often hear people bemoaning the fact that they have to see a psychiatrist (for 10 minutes) for their meds; and they have to see a separate therapist for talk therapy. I see a neuropsychologist licensed to prescribe meds. Because of his background, he understands how my medical illnesses intersect my mental illnesses, and can treat me accordingly, including my meds. I highly recommend this if you can find it!

LEARN ABOUT YOUR MEDICATIONS

Finding medication that makes you feel better can seem like an endless, hopeless endeavor. Read about the medications you are prescribed and keep track of how these medications are making you feel. Learn to get specific about how these medications work. The more specific you get, the better prepared your psychiatrist will be to find an alternative or make adjustments.

BE YOUR OWN ADVOCATE

No one else knows better than you what you are feeling ... how your sleep is, any changes in your energy level, changes with your thinking, side effects from meds, etc. If you don't feel your psychiatrist or other mental health provider is listening to your concerns, and you have tried a few times and feel dismissed, it may be time to seek out another doctor or therapist.

TIP FROM HOUSE

"I know a lot of people think therapy is about sitting around staring at your own navel—but it's staring at your own navel with a goal. And the goal is to one day to see the world in a better way and treat your loved ones with more kindness and have more to give." —Hugh Laurie

WHEN YOUR APPOINTMENT ISN'T SOON ENOUGH

The wait time for psychiatrist appointments can be a very long time—weeks, even months. When you need to see your doctor sooner than your scheduled appointment, ask to be "called in on a cancellation." If an appointment slot opens up, as they often do because of cancellations, you'll be able to see your doctor much sooner.

DEPRESSION

KEEP GOING

It's not failure if you learn something from it.

GOOD HUMOR QUOTE

Good humor is a tonic for mind and body. It is the best antidote for anxiety and depression. It is a business asset. It attracts and keeps friends. It lightens human burdens. It is the direct route to serenity and contentment.

—Grenville Kleise

GET OUT AND GO.

If I wait until I feel like socializing, I might be waiting a long time. But, I'll probably enjoy it. If I push myself to just go ahead and do it.

NOW LISTEN TO THIS WHEN YOU'RE DOWN!

When I feel down, I forget all of my good points, they are harder to see but they are still there.

WHAT IS RECOVERY?

Recovery begins when you live your life focused on what's meaningful to you without the interference of symptoms.

BE COMPASSIONATE

Please do not judge me. Try to understand that my high energy—sometimes overwhelming to you—is in no way me trying to upset or move into your space. It's just that I can't turn it on and off. It comes quickly and it stays with me for a while. Thank you for understanding and being compassionate.

LIGHT OF DAY

Greet each day with a clean deep breath and hold it for a few seconds while you just focus on you. As you let out that deep breath, feel the warm air leave your body, passing over your lips. Imagine you could see it. Now take another deep cleansing breath. Feel the warm golden light it brings with it, filling you again. You're at peace in this moment, remember to love yourself, forgive yourself, and be proud at the end of the day. You did well today! :)

WHEN YOU BECOME AGGRAVATED OR FRUSTRATED

Take a deep breathe, allowing the air to puff out your cheeks. Don't hold it in. Count up to 10, then back down, then up, and so on as you exhale quietly and slowly. Do that until you need another breathe—and do it again.

STORY

When the story we tell ourselves about our lives fails to fit at a deep level then this leads to depression and breakdown. Have a simple, day by day, week by week, story.

LOOKING YOUR BEST—AT LEAST BRUSH YOUR TEETH

My Mother used to say, "Look your best when you feel the worst and don't forget to put on a smile." Enough said. :)

ON LOSS

A person isn't who they are during the last conversation you had with them—they're who they've been throughout your whole relationship.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

REMEMBER THIS

The tragedy is not that things are broken. The tragedy is that things are not mended again.
—Alan Paton

EMPLOYMENT

WHAT I WANT IN A JOB

Learned something new on BP magazine—Asking myself, “If possible and no restrictions what would I want from a job that would help me towards wellness rather than deter me?” I realized it is possible.

PROFESSIONALS WITH DEPRESSION

I am a nurse. A very caring, loving geriatric nurse. I also am bipolar. Professionals can have depression, bipolar too and it is ok.

FEELING TIRED PHYSICALLY & MENTALLY

Plan meals @ work, prepare clothes in advance, get more sleep during the week, decrease commitments during the week, discuss energy and fatigue levels with my health professional, plan days off/annual leave to prevent fatigue & accumulation of stress.

ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm is that kindling spark which marks the difference between the leaders in every activity and the laggards who put in just enough to get by.
—Unknown

DISCLOSING YOUR ILLNESS TO YOUR EMPLOYER

This is a highly complex and personal question. A website that helped me to decide this is the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. Ultimately, I decided to disclose. It has worked out very well, and I've been at my current job for five years. Your decision, of course, may be different, but it is worth considering some level of disclosure because you can then invoke your legal right to workplace accommodations if you need them.

EXPLAINING A GAP IN EMPLOYMENT

What do you put on your resume if you've been out on disability for a period of time? I was on disability for four years before I was able to re-enter the workforce. I looked at my skills, one of which was editing. I volunteered to help edit two publications without pay. Then, on my resume, I listed "Freelance Editor, Self Employed" to cover the gap. No one needed to know that I only did two projects, or that the work was done for free. I successfully got a new job with this on my resume.

WELLNESS IS WORKING

I find that going to work even volunteer work helps keep me on a schedule and forces me to be stable mood. When things get stressful, I find that a supportive boss or someone who listens in the office environment can help to reduce it.

USING HEADPHONES IN THE OFFICE

Sometimes, the noise of the office can grate on me. It can feel like the onset of a manic episode at times. I asked my supervisor if I could occasionally use headphones and my own radio to drown out the noises of the office and be able to focus more effectively on my work. I did not mention my illness, just asked to "try out" the headphones. We both agreed I seemed to get more work done with the headphones on—and I could still hear my phone ring—so now I can use the radio and headphones when ever I feel the need for them.

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES

MOTIVATION

"With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts."
—Eleanor Roosevelt

TO LIVE

"I think there must also be a prevenient courage that allows us to be brave - that is, to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm."
—Marilynne Robinson

YOU ARE THE SKY

"You are the sky. Everything else is just the weather."
—Pema Chodron

ONE PERSON

"To the world you are one person, but to one person, you are the world."
—Unknown

ENDURANCE

"One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight of the shore for a very long time."
—Andre Gide

MANIA

LETTING THOUGHT GO

I keep a notebook and when I notice I am having thoughts that are distracting me, I write them down. Then, most of the time, I am able to let it go for awhile.

STAY PRESENT

There is a tendency to brood about the past and run scary scenarios about the future, neither of which we can control. The present is now and all we really have.

IRRITABIITY

When mania strikes and I get nasty, I have trained myself to shut up! No one deserves what I want to come out and it isn't anyone's fault I feel that way so I just don't talk.

VOICES

A lot of the time when the voices say I'm worthless, I just agree with them—they must be right, I am bad. But you know what? A lot of the time they're flat-out WRONG. And I don't have to just nod my head and get sadder and sadder, I can TELL them (quietly in my head, or even out loud if I'm alone), to shut up! I don't deserve that kind of abuse. Neither do you.

SLEEP

Be absolutely sure you are getting the right amount of sleep. Keep track of the hours you sleep. If you are not sleeping enough, do something about it immediately, before mania gets you. Nip this in the bud before it gets out of hand.

NON MANIC ALTERNATIVES

I do something not related to mania—I draw or play music on a non-frustrating instrument. It lets me forget what is playing out in my mind.

SELF-CONTROL

Self control isn't just in the moment; it's also setting yourself up for success. Learn your triggers, recognize them as they approach, and make plans to manage or avoid them in advance. Beating yourself up for not being able to control yourself in the moment instead of planning for the future does you no good!

HANG ON

When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.

RACING THOUGHTS

When your mind is racing try doing a puzzle like a crossword puzzle. It has so many points to ponder that it almost seems to make the thoughts ease off a little while. You can still multi-task in your brain. It's relaxing yet stimulating. And crosswords build your IQ.

MUSIC FOR MY MANIA

Music plays a large part in my emotions. I have to be careful what I listen to. I like a lot of different kinds of music, which provokes my emotions, which then leads to changes in my behavior. I always have a playlist that helps me back to recovery when I'm not doing well.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

PLAY MORE

I always like going to story time and playing with my grandchildren because these are times when I forget my worries and do simple things that lift my spirit like singing those children's songs like *Old McDonald Had a Farm*, etc. And getting out and enjoying a day of running, skipping, and jumping.

CHRONIC PAIN

Try....and I do mean, try to do a bit of stretching daily. It may hurt at first, but you'll feel better in the long run and you might be able to slowly increase your agility and stamina.

EXERCISE

For years, friends and professionals suggested routine and exercise to help with my bipolar. I resisted it. Now, both save me. I adopted a wonderful 125 lb. Great Pyrenees dog 8 months ago and walk him 3 miles a day each morning. It's wonderful "me" time. I think, meditate, and just flourish in nature and the outdoors. I'm lucky to live on a lake in a very pretty area. I've made new friends along the way. The exercise helps my body and soul.

EXERCISE HELPS

Exercise helps to ease mania and anxiety. It gives me a sense of accomplishment, which helps to alleviate depression. An added benefit is an improved body image.

GETTING TO THE GYM

I use the alarm in my cell phone and set it to go off 2 hours before the yoga and Pilates classes start at my gym. I can set it to repeat every week on that day, so every day the alarm goes off and reminds me of the class I should be at in 2 hours.

HEALTHY MEALS AT RESTAURANTS

I look at the websites of my favorite restaurants and see if they have nutritional information. I keep a list of the healthy meals at each restaurant, along with the number of calories in each meal. This list is always kept in my purse. For example, if I go to Applebee's for dinner I won't look at the menu. I'll pull out my list and choose from there. Then I won't be tempted by all the fattening food on the menu.

STICKING TO A MEAL PLAN

I plan out my meals a day in advance so that I won't impulsively binge eat. I also make sure that I eat lots of vegetables so that I'll be full without consuming too many calories. By the time I'm done dinner I will be so full from the vegetables that there's no room for dessert!

AVOID EATING ALL THE JUNK FOOD IN THE HOUSE

When I buy junk food I will get the food and divide it into the recommended portions, putting each portion in a separate Ziploc bag. I will keep one bag/portion in the house and the rest of them in the trunk of my car. Then I'll only be able to eat one portion unless I feel like going out to the car to get more. Also, I won't impulsively eat while driving because I'd have to pull over to get the food out of the trunk.

RECOVERY FOCUS

MINDFULNESS = AWARENESS

Be mindful. Learn mindfulness. Be aware of every footstep, every bird chirp, and every light. Mindfulness has been MY KEY.

TEARS

I always thought crying was bad, for the weak. Crying is for the healthy. I cried all my life and thought I was worthless and should hide myself. The tears that run down my face reflect pain leaving the body. I cry to let pain and all the bad feelings out of my body. Crying is like sweating; another form of letting out the toxins and bringing in the joy we deserve from this beautiful life of ours.

ON PATIENCE

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

LIVING

There are a thousand reasons to live this life, every one of them sufficient.

—Marilynne Robinson

MOVING FORWARD

To make lasting changes in my life, I had to not only look at the past, but examine what happened—all of it. It is because of this new awareness that I am able to recognize when I am slipping into old patterns that I don't need in my new healthier life in recovery. I have come to know the truth about me, about my family, about my past and as a result—I was able to forgive myself and them.

IT'S OKAY TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

More and more, I'm learning that it's okay to take care of myself. The better I take care of myself, the easier it will be for me to help others.

RELATIONSHIPS

INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE

Be honest. Try to be friendly. Try your best to give off a positive vibe. Let the person or people know that it's not in your nature to get close to people, and you want to change that. Hopefully if you do end up having a bit of a panic, they will let you know that it's ok and they will calm you.

SUPPORT GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

I'm finding out now that a relationship I became involved in from my support group was a very bad idea. He figured it out before I did and broke things off with me at a very bad time in my life. Now that I know better, I realize it was doomed from the start. Fix yourself before trying to ask someone for support when they need a lot of help themselves. You can't "fix" anybody's problems, especially when you can't even fix your own.

SNAPPING @ LOVED ONES

When in an irritated/agitated state it is so difficult not to snap at the ones who we are closest to. Try to catch your self and let the person know that you are not upset with them, that you are agitated and try to tell them why or tell them that you aren't sure why but that the problem isn't them. It makes me feel better because I know it helps my friends and family to not take on guilt, anger, or blame.

SLEEP

BREATH = SLEEP

When feeling restless, take deep breaths and stretch before bed. Breathe and write thoughts in *your journal*.

HOW TO WAKE UP HAPPIER

When in a depressed state, it is often hard to get motivated to get out of bed. Giving into the "why bothers" never works out in the long run. Try this trick: every night before going to bed, plan at least two rewarding activities for the next day. They can be anything from going out on a short hike, calling a friend, or trying out a new recipe. It is much easier going to sleep AND waking up knowing that there is something to look forward to. Feeling productive gives one purpose and energy!

MUSIC CALMS US

When I can't sleep, I put my iPod on random and try to guess what song will play next. Before I know it, I am fast asleep.

BEDTIME

My favorite way to calm down at night is to take my medication and then lay down and read for a little while until my meds kick in. You have to watch what type of material you read so that it will not keep you awake and your mind active when you need to be sleeping.

NO INTERNET AFTER DARK!

Turn off the computer no later than 9:30 or there will be no sleep!!

SUPPORT GROUPS

SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups are nice for people who have a mental illness. Instead of facing the people who are not able to understand or who are afraid of mental illness, they provides an opportunity to relate to others.

OURSELVES

"Life is not about finding ourselves, it's about creating ourselves"—Unknown

RECOVERY INC...GO!

I was overwhelmed by the idea of being a group with people I do not know. I also am still a little apprehensive of trusting their techniques. I also am afraid of being 'a screw up,' b/c I think I might not be at a place where I am ready to ALWAYS use their tips and tools. But I now realize, it's not about perfection; it's about learning—SLOWLY over time—how to implement tools to help me deal with my symptoms. It gives me community to receive help when I need it & share jobs well done!

DBSA: A GODSEND

DBSA groups have been a Godsend. I had been diagnosed years earlier but my recovery didn't really start until I found DBSA (Depression Bipolar Support Alliance) groups. In them, I found support and understanding. And with them, I began my path to wellness. The people have been so welcoming and kind and I have truly found kindred spirits. One of the best things, too, is that you find yourself helping others, as others have once helped you. Thank God for support groups.

MAKE SURE YOUR GROUP IS A RECOVERY GROUP NOT AN ILLNESS GROUP

When I started going to a support group, I made an effort to talk about my goals and my dreams, and the one or two things that were better this week than last week, and the one or two things I was going to try next week. Little by little, this helped the group to start focusing on what we want to be and become and do—and not focus on how ill we were and how bad we felt. Who wants a pity party? I want a life.

WELLNESS

MOVING FORWARD

Sometimes it doesn't matter what little step you take. Just take one small step in the direction in which you want to go. Just do it and you will feel much better!

SUCCESS

To laugh often and much;
 To win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children;
 To earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends;
 To appreciate beauty, to find the best in others;
 To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition;
 To know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived.
 This is to have succeeded.
 —Ralph Waldo Emerson

ON GOODNESS

A kind of light spread out from her. And everything changed color. And the world opened out. And a day was good to awaken to. And there were no limits to anything. And the people of the world were good and handsome. And I was not afraid any more.
 —John Steinbeck, *East of Eden*

BREATHE

There's a reason why one of the commandments is the Sabbath, where you can rest and breathe and do no work. Instead, treat yourself, have fun, and rejoice with the Lord.

SMALL THINGS

Sometimes having someone just shoot you a text or phone call saying everything is ok can make you stop and realize that everything will be ok.

SMILE

Make sure to smile about something today!

BALANCE

It is hard to find that perfect balance in life, but try each day to do the things that need to be done first, and then take time for prayer and relaxation.

BENEFITS OF YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

I find my local library to be a great source for recovery. In addition to many self-help materials, I often find that choosing fun/fiction books can lift my spirits. I can access the Internet, and sometimes Google silly things like bubbles or connect with support. I also gather info about upcoming events in my community. I have seen online downloads for Kindle, so that they keep up with the times. These and other benefits may be just down the road at your local library!

WRITE

Writing about your experiences helps you bring out what you know you should do. To see it in front of you, on paper, is really awesome.

Facing Us is a program of



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance