

Your DEI Depression Inventory

When you're depressed, you may turn inward and blame yourself, but depression is not simply a low mood that arises from within you. Sometimes, depression is a perfectly reasonable response to trouble in your life; depression is often an important signal about real issues that are disturbing you. In our Dynamic Emotional Integration® work, the questions for depression are: *Where has my energy gone?* and *Why was it sent away?*

Depression is a message about and a reaction to things that are going on inside or around you. It's important to pay attention to that message and address whatever is going on.

Current research is suggesting that untreated depressions, especially major depressions (see this [Mayo Clinic description of major depression](#)), can teach your brain how to fall into depression more easily the next time. Untreated depressive episodes can become a habit, so it's very important to address depression with whatever therapy best suits your particular situation.

If you are feeling continually low, please see your doctor or visit the [Helpguide.org depression page](#) to understand more about your symptoms and your options. We all feel depressed every now and then, and help is everywhere.

So, you're depressed. What's next?

We all experience depression for many reasons, yet in most cases, the cures that are offered to us focus on us: on our behaviors, our chemistry, or our habits of thought. But depression isn't just something that comes from inside you; often, depression is a response to trouble in your life.

There are plenty of life situations that are depressing — such as conflicts, difficulties, injustice, illness, loss, and turmoil. These things *should* produce some depression. In the face of troubles, something in us should stop moving carelessly forward as if nothing is happening. Something in us should drop, lose energy, and experience a sense of despair or hopelessness every now and then.

Depression can be very challenging, it's true, and we should be careful about how long we maintain a depressive mood — but depression has a very important purpose, so it's not something that should be avoided as if it's the plague. Depression's purpose is to tell us that something is wrong. Our job is to find out what that something is.

Karla McLaren created this inventory as a way to keep a close watch on her own depressive tendencies (her form of depression is Recurrent Major Depression with Dysthymia). She's found that by taking an inventory of what's going on around her, she can pretty quickly pinpoint whether her depression is situational (which means that she can make lifestyle changes) or internal (which is a sign that she needs to use some of the Empathic Mindfulness practices and/or check in with her health care team).

This inventory involves your whole life, because depression can be a natural and healthy response to a rotten environment. It's important to be able to understand and identify the differences between depression that comes from inside you, depression that comes from your

situation, and depression that is a combination of both. If you tend toward depression, this inventory (and your doctor's guidance, of course) may be helpful:

The Personal (Are you taking good care of yourself?)

Diet

Are you eating well, or often enough? Some depressed people avoid food or focus everything on food, and their meals aren't regular or particularly nutritious. Low blood sugar or spikes in blood sugar from an irregular diet can make depression worse.

Exercise

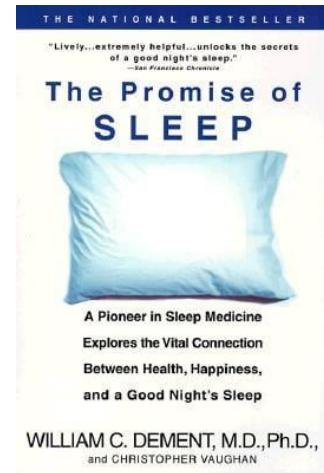
Are you getting enough exercise, or any? Exercise has been shown time and again to be an excellent mood elevator and a way to break a depressive cycle. [This article](#) suggests ways to exercise when you're so low that you can't even *think* about exercising.

Sleep

Are you getting at least seven hours of restful sleep each night? In his book [The Promise of Sleep](#), the father of sleep research, the late, great Dr. William Dement, notes that of the three: diet, exercise, and sleep, only *sleep* is positively correlated with increased longevity and reduced prevalence of disease. This free HelpGuide article on [How to Sleep Better](#) has many excellent tips.

Very few of us treat our sleep as the most important aspect of our healthcare efforts, yet researchers are continually confirming Dr. Dement's advice (most recently, it was found that you should keep your bedroom as dark as you possibly can make it, because [light at night is being linked to depression](#)).

An excellent and soothing book for people with sleep problems or insomnia is W. Chris Winter's [The Sleep Solution](#). He combines decades of strong research with a warm and friendly tone, and he offers ideas that truly help.



The Relational (Are you surrounded by good people?)

Your mate or lack thereof

Is your relationship working? Do you feel loved, respected, and welcomed in your relationship? If not, your depression may be trying to tell you something. Or are you alone and feeling isolated? Loneliness and a sense of disconnection can lead to depression.

Your family relationships

Is your family a healthy place to be, or is it full of endless tension and unsaid words? Family conflicts can feel depressing and entrapping.

Your friends

Are your friends supportive and restful, funny and good to you? Or do you have to tolerate a lot of "frenemy" conflict and turmoil from people who really don't have your best interests at heart? [This Scientific American study](#) suggests that frenemies are not just depressing, but can actually harm your health.

Your colleagues

Is your work environment healthy and emotionally well-regulated? How well is your workplace managed? How are you treated? Do you look forward to getting to work each day, or do you dread it?

The Sociological (Is your social environment healthy?)

Your financial situation

Are you experiencing money worries, or are you concerned about friends and family who are? Is there financial trouble in your community or your nation? There's a reason times like these are called "depressions."

Your employment

Are you unemployed, or is your current job unstable? Both of these can lead to depression.

The condition of your community

Are you engaged with and hopeful about the future of your community and your town? If not, social alienation can lead to depression.

Your political situation

Are you hopeful about where your town, county, state, and country are headed? Do you feel comfortable with your political party and its direction? If not, political powerlessness can lead to depression (and for some people, to repetitive outbursts of frustration and rage).

Some ideas for working through depression

If you're already exercising, eating well, sleeping well, getting treated medically for depression, and taking good care of yourself — but your *situation* is depressing you, it's important to look outside yourself for support. Therapy can be very helpful, but therapy is not the only answer.

When you're surrounded by unhealthy relationships, or your financial or political situations are filled with trouble, then your depression is probably trying to tell you that things are not as they should be. So how do you work through your depression when, honestly, things are terrible and your depression is actually the correct emotion to feel in the situation?

The next two pages contain some ideas for you.

Entertainment!

Distractions like games, TV, movies, texting, web surfing, sports, masturbation ... all of these can give you a nice time out and, in many cases, they can bring you excellent positive input and a sense of pleasure and peace. Distractions are awesome!

Keep an eye on the amount of time you spend on distractions each day, but don't shame yourself about it; just take note. Sometimes, distractions are the only things that can keep you going when you're surrounded by trouble.

If you notice yourself using distractions all the time, be gentle with yourself and ask if the time you're spending on distractions is actually keeping you from dealing directly with the depressing situations in your life. Maybe this is true, but maybe your distractions are keeping you going because you're in an unworkable situation that you can't get away from yet.

Distractions can be very useful! Love them, observe them, and treat yourself well around them.

Artistic Expression

Expressing yourself artistically (or viewing the artistry and craftsmanship of others) is a special kind of healing activity. Something about writing, singing, painting, building, dancing, and creating can give you a sense of freedom, creativity, focus, and personal control. Doing your art can even be a form of protest against terrible life situations.

If you're feeling totally awful, you can even channel those awful feelings into your art and see what your awfulness is trying to tell you. Doing art with emotions is actually the genesis of the Empathic Mindfulness practices, especially Burning Contracts and Conscious Complaining (see [The Language of Emotions](#) and [The Art of Empathy](#)).

Art can heal you when almost everything else fails. Art is a magical healing practice for the soul.

Connection

Connecting with others is especially important for people who are feeling relational and sociological depression. Creating or joining an interest group, volunteering, caring for people or animals, giving or receiving bodywork, having good sex ... all of these can help you reconnect to the positive aspects of humanity and community.

During depressions, we tend to withdraw, which can be a really good idea when our depression is a response to rotten relationships or miserable social environments. But it's important, when you've identified that your depression is a response to your environment, to reach out for *healthy* relationships, *healthy* groups, and *positive* social engagement.

Good people, healthy groups, and hopeful civic action exist. Don't allow your depression to color the entire world with the palette it created from your current rotten situation. Healthy community and healthy connections can help you feel well again.

Nature and Animals

Getting out into nature can be magically healing — especially if you can be near a body of water or look out over an expansive vista. Nature can also fill you with a sense of connection that may work better for you than connecting to people right now.

Animals can be wonderful companions who won't judge your emotions. You may want to be with companion animals, or you might enjoy watching wild animals in their natural habitats. Natural environments and contact with animals can connect you to living things in soothing ways.

Sacredness and Transcendence

Depression can strip the meaning from life, and it can lead to a sense of emptiness and hopelessness. All of the suggestions above can address depression, but if you've come to a place of emptiness and world-weariness, you'll need contact with something larger, older, and deeper than yourself so that you can engage with the sacred, soul-making work of wrestling with deep questions of purpose and meaning.

For many people, sacredness and transcendence live only in the realm of religion and spirituality. But the pull toward the sacred, the transcendent, the larger purpose, and the deeper meaning — these live fully in the human heart and mind. Certainly, these qualities can play out wonderfully (or horribly) in religions and spiritual traditions, but these traditions don't own sacredness, or transcendence, or purpose, or deep meaning. These qualities belong to humans, and each of us has full access to them.

When you've lost your sense of purpose and meaning, it's time to reach behind and beyond yourself — to historical thinkers, to the grandeur and mystery of nature, to great writers, artists, and poets, to philosophers and dreamers, to beauty and to intensity — and take your place as a deeply feeling person in a world of sacred, absurd, deep, shallow, and transcendent ideas and experiences.

Depression can lead you into the dark night of the soul — and art, connection, nature, sacredness, and transcendence can lead you through that night and into the dawn of new ideas, new possibilities, and a deeper understanding of human nature, conflict, beauty, injustice, trouble, love, meaning, and meaninglessness. Depression is ingenious in that way, and this inventory can help you uncover the ingenuity inside your depression.

Reflection Questions

- As you think back to times of depression, can you take an inventory now (see the next page) and discover where your energy was being impeded, and why?
- If you were to go back in time and give your depressed self one piece of advice, what would it be?

Your DEI Depression Inventory Checklist

You can get a good overview of your depression by using this quick checklist to inventory your life: Place a checkmark by any areas where trouble is occurring — and ask yourself if your depression could be a reasonable response to a depressing *situation*? If so, see pages 3–5 for some ideas about how to take care of yourself. And of course, if your depression persists, check in with a friend, a counselor, or your doctor for some companionship and relief.

The Personal

- Diet
- Exercise
- Sleep

The Relational

- Your mate (or lack thereof)
- Family
- Friends
- Colleagues

The Sociological

- Your Financial Condition
- Your Employment Situation
- The Condition of Your Community
- Your Political Situation

How are you working through your depression?

- Entertainment
- Artistic Expression
- Connecting with Others
- Nature and/or Animals
- Sacredness and Transcendence

Even if you find trouble in many areas and your depression arises for perfectly sensible reasons, depressions that last too long can affect your energy, your outlook, and your health. Listen to your depression, but take care of yourself — and reach out — when depression arises. If you don't have social support or healthcare access, the [Helpguide.org depression page](#) can help you find help and support. Reach out.

Good help is available, and you're not alone. Take good care.