

How to get your life back after being depressed

After recovering it can be tough figuring out where to go next, but give yourself time and remember – you are not your illness

This week (May 16-22) is Mental Health Awareness Week, with “relationships” as the theme. We’ll be running features all week about the mental health of those close to you, the mental health of the artists that inspire you and the different ways that communities and individuals deal with the issue. Slowly but surely, progress is being made in the ways in which we discuss a problem that affects each and every one of us.

Before I was depressed, I was pretty good at this life thing. I sometimes ate vegetables and kept my alcohol consumption within an almost acceptable level. I was able to get up at an early-ish time and could generally do my work without taking hourly breaks for sobbing. Suddenly that all changed and my idea of a successful day soon became one when I could find the energy to walk to the kitchen to microwave a ready meal lasagne.

When you’re that low, the tiniest things seem like the most effort you’ve ever made. I’d swap things like showering, communicating and getting dressed for a day spent lying face down on the floor of my room or an evening spent texting my friends to tell them I was too broke to come out, when really I just couldn’t move. *This is my life now*, I remember thinking, *I don’t see how this could ever end.*

I was completely wrong – my depression lifted. Yet after months and months of my to-do list for the day being *stay alive* I suddenly found myself being in a place where I was healthy and capable enough to do the things I wanted to do for

so long, but hesitant to do them. Admitting you're depressed is hard. Getting better is harder. Here's what I learned en route to the wonderful start of the rest of my life. ADVERTISING



YOU WERE NOT YOUR DEPRESSION

Sometimes I was a terrible person when I was depressed, but not because I am inherently a terrible person. The people that love you won't hate you for your sulking or your outbursts or your unwillingness to socialise. Even the people that merely like you probably don't hate you. You are not the unreasonable person depression made you. You are not your depression. You're a perfectly normal person who went through a difficult time. In all probability, you probably don't need to give any lengthy apologies to anyone. The people that matter won't expect one.

GIVE YOURSELF TIME

Remember how suddenly and unannounced depression seemed to come into your life? Remember how one day things seemed mostly bearable and next thing you knew it was taking you two hours and three crying spells to put on a shoe? Coming out of it will feel pretty much the same, just in reverse. It will happen gradually, then suddenly. You'll realise that your brain is not broken. You are not stuck. You were not destined to feel this way forever.

Understandably, it's hard to see it at first but soon you'll find it hard to believe that all that depression stuff ever even happened. Do what you need to do – take time off, get therapy, sleep in, give yourself a break, please – but don't think you don't deserve as much happiness as anyone else. You absolutely do.



THE PEOPLE THAT DIDN'T STAY WEREN'T WORTH HANGING AROUND FOR

When you feel so hopeless, it can be hard to be around yourself, let alone for anyone else to be around you. It doesn't mean no-one will try. Depression can teach you who your real friends are and that's no bad thing. When it's over, reach out to anyone you've lost contact with and give them the chance to reconnect. Count those who sat up with you all night talking you out of giving up because they cared, or sat with you in the waiting room at the doctors because you were scared to go alone, or hugged you and told you they loved you because they didn't want to lose you. These people are worth a million of the people who ran the moment you really needed them.

LIFE FEELS GREAT

Here's an abridged list of things that feel so much better after feeling so terrible: food, friends, sex, working, kissing, dancing, sleeping, music, making plans, looking at yourself in the mirror, meeting new people, leaving the house (or just your bed), studying, getting in at 7am, getting up at 7am, thinking about the future (or the past)... and (my favourite), spending a whole day doing absolutely nothing without feeling like you're the worst person in the world for doing it.

Depression is pretty good at switching all your feelings and senses off, and when I started realising how good feeling just 'ok' could be, there was a part of me that wanted to cling on to being depressed because it felt scary to feel anything else. I'd almost forgot what feeling 'normal' was like and the range of feelings was almost too much. Take small steps if you need to, but know feeling things is mostly better than feeling nothing at all.

TRUST YOUR INSTINCTS ABOUT WHEN TO MOVE ON

The moment you stop feeling like the world is about to cave in on you at any moment it can be tempting to immediately ditch any medications, cancel your therapy and happily tell your doctor or psychiatrist you'll never see them again. The problem with depression is that sometimes you get so excited over a slight improvement in mood that you forget there's still a way to go. Think it through. Trust your gut. You'll have days or weeks along the way where things are still difficult, but they'll get less and less hard as time goes on. You've got this. You're going to get better at this each day. It all comes down to this: you'll choose to stick this out because you wanted to see if life was worth it. More than anything, I'm willing to bet you'll find it is.

(Source: Dazed.com)