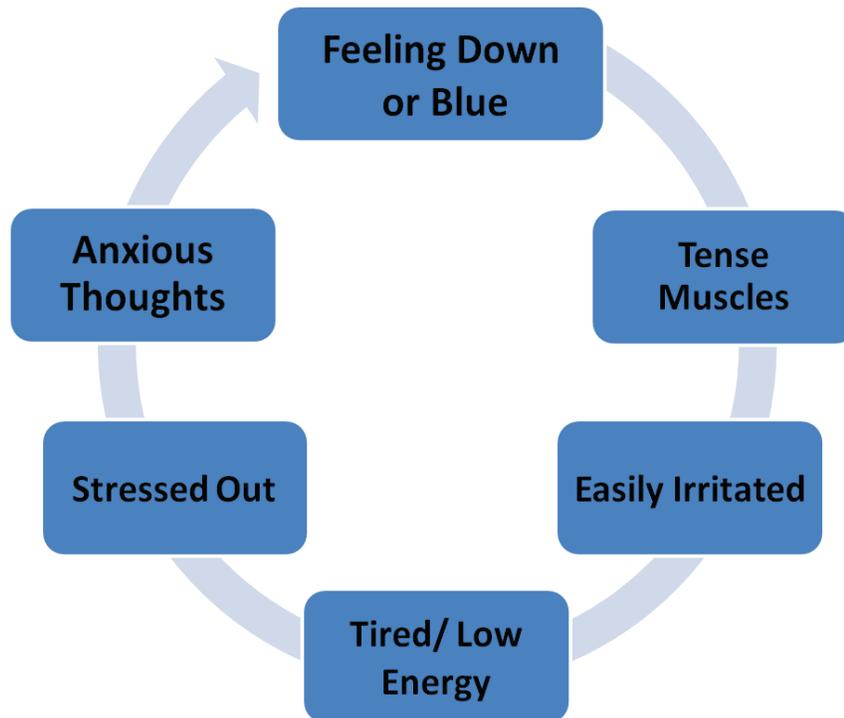


Manage Your Health: One Step at a Time



Strengthen Your Spirit Self Assessment and Tools for Healthy Coping

Feeling down, or blue, can affect many parts of our lives. Negative emotions can feed on each other and create a vicious cycle. Are any of these problems in the picture below of concern to you? Draw a circle around the ones that are problems for you.



Many people find that they are affected by more than one of these problems at a time. For example, a person can feel stressed, get tight neck and shoulder muscles, and then feel irritable. It can feel like these problems feed on each other. For the problems that you circled there are things that you can do to help yourself.

Tool Box

There is a whole “tool box” of self management skills that can help you cope better when you’re feeling down. **Learning and practicing these skills can make you a stronger person; they can strengthen your spirit.** Just like different household tools work for different tasks, the tools in this tool box will work for different problems. Using the tools that are right for you can help you manage your problems and break the cycle of symptoms feeding on each other. Give these tools a try and see which ones work for you.



Problem: Muscle Tension

Tool: Muscle Relaxation

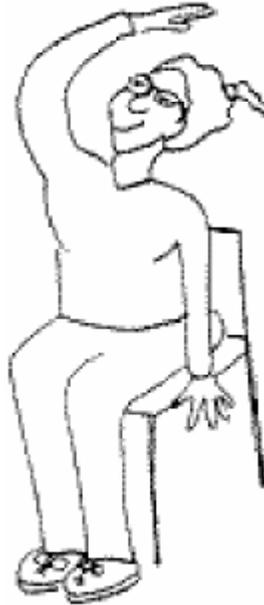
Progressive muscle relaxation is a useful way to reduce muscular tension and stress.

To relax muscles, you need to know how to scan your body, recognize where you’re holding tension and release that tension.

The first step is to become familiar with the difference between the feeling of tension and the feeling of relaxation.

Here are examples of simple exercises that can be done any time of day to help ease muscle tension.

- Start by sitting and taking 3 big deep breaths. Now take one hand over your head, hold it for 10 seconds. Repeat with the other hand. Be sure to relax your shoulders.



- Move your arms in circles— 10 times forwards and 10 times backwards. Make sure your shoulders are still relaxed.



- Place your hands on your shoulders and roll them forward 10 times, then backwards 10 times.
- Keeping your shoulders relaxed, and your hands on your shoulders, touch your elbows together 10 times.



- Place both hands above your head, lean to the right and hold for 10 seconds. Then lean to the left and hold for 10 seconds.



Problem: Feeling down, depressed or hopeless

Tool: Positive Thinking/Self-Talk

Self-talk is the habitual things we say to ourselves. We all do it, whether we realize it or not. Self-talk comes in many forms, mostly negative (“I just can’t do....” “I’ll never remember that...” “I’m such a klutz.....”).

This type of self-talk represents doubts and fears we have about ourselves and our abilities.

You can learn to make self-talk work for you instead of against you. Changing negative statements to positive ones is an important tool for reducing negative emotions.

Steps for getting positive self-talk to work for you:

1. **Listen** carefully to what you say to or about yourself, both out loud and silently.

2. **Write** down all the negative self talk statements or irrational beliefs (Use the table on the next page)
3. **Change** them to rational and helpful self-talk
4. **Rehearse** mentally
5. **Practice** in real situations
6. **Be patient**...it takes time to instill new habits

Remember the little engine that could... **“I think I can.”**

Here are some examples of positive spins on negative thoughts:

Negative Self-Talk	Positive Statements
I feel so stupid. I can't do it.	If I try my best to figure this out.
I can't exercise. It's too hard.	I will start slow and take it one day at a time.
There's not enough time.	I will reevaluate my priorities and begin with the first step.

Fill in the rest of the chart with examples of your own negative thoughts. Then change them to rational and positive thoughts!



Problem: Feeling stressed out

Tool: Problem solving

It's common to feel stressed out and feel like we can't manage everything we have to accomplish each day. And often, we can't accomplish all of the things we would like to. That is why it's helpful to prioritize. You can break down your problems into easier to manage, smaller steps.

First, **make a list** of everything you need to do. Now check “must do” by the tasks that need to be taken care of immediately or “can wait” by the ones you can do later.

To Do List	Must Do	Can Wait

Next, **evaluate** your “Must Do” list. Can any of your items be broken down into smaller steps? If so, write each of the smaller steps in the “Must Do List “below.

Must Do	Do Today

Check off the items that you can do today. Repeat this process each day. Don’t forget to cross off tasks when you have completed them and feel good about what you have accomplished.



Problem: Anxious Thoughts

Tool: Distraction

Distraction is a good coping mechanism because our mind doesn’t focus well on two things at the same time. That is why it is hard to rub your head and pat your stomach at the same time. Short-term distraction is a temporary solution to eliminate anxious thoughts. Some examples of short-term distraction techniques are counting backwards by threes, thinking of a flower or bird for each letter of the alphabet, making plans for a future event in your head, or trying to think of all the words to an old song. This technique is good when you want to take your mind off something unpleasant that you need to go through, like getting a procedure done at the doctor’s office, for example. It shouldn’t be used to ignore serious concerns, like chest pain.

Tool: Prayer or quiet time

Prayer can be a form of relaxation to help reduce tension and anxiety. It can also be a method of distraction to refocus your attention away from anxious thoughts. Use your quiet time or prayer time to release and let go of all the things that are making you anxious. Trust that you are being cared for and that all is well.



Problem: Easily Irritated

Tool: Communication Skills

Everyone at one time or another has experienced communication problems. Learning to communicate more effectively can help alleviate irritations. Here are some suggestions to help improve communication:

1. **Identify** what is really bothering you
2. **Express** your feelings constructively, for example: “When this happens I feel...” or “I feel I’m not being heard” instead of “You never listen to me”
3. **Listen** attentively—try waiting a few seconds after the other person has finished before responding
4. **Clarify**—repeat what you think you heard using your own words, then ask for confirmation that you understood or clarification if needed

Tool: Breathing Techniques

Breath is energy. When energy is brought into your body it nourishes your muscles, blood and brain, helping you feel stronger and healthier in both body and mind.

Pursed-lip breathing can help strengthen and improve the coordination and efficiency of your breathing muscles as well as help you feel calmer and more relaxed.

Tool: Pursed-lip breathing

The pursed-lip breathing technique can be used anytime you feel tense, stressed, or irritated.

1. Breathe in through your nose
2. Hold your breath briefly
3. With your lips pursed (as if you were going to whistle), breathe out slowly through your mouth. Exhaling should take twice as long as inhaling.
4. Practice this technique for 5-10 minutes, 2-4 times a day.



Problem: Always Tired/Low Energy

Tool: Walking

Being physically active can actually give you more energy. Walking is one of the easiest ways to be physically active. You can do it almost anywhere and at any time.

Steps to begin a walking program:

1. Find a buddy to walk with you. My walking buddy is: _____
2. Choose a safe place to walk. My safe walking location is : _____
3. Decide on a good time to walk. A good day _____ and time: _____
4. Wear shoes with thick flexible soles and socks that will cushion your feet.
Do I need to shop for comfortable shoes and socks? _____

Other walking tips:

- Wear clothes that will keep you dry and comfortable. Layer so you can adjust as needed.
- For extra warmth in winter, wear a stocking cap. To stay cool in summer, wear a baseball cap or visor.
- Do light stretching before and after you walk.
- Think of your walk in three parts. Walk slowly for 5 minutes. Increase your speed for the next 5 minutes. Finally, to cool down, walk slowly again for 5 minutes.
- Try to walk at least three times per week. Add 2 to 3 minutes per week to the fast walk. If you walk less than three times per week, increase the fast walk more slowly.
- To avoid stiff or sore muscles or joints, start gradually. Over several weeks, begin walking faster, going further, or walking for longer periods of time.

How do I begin to “Strengthen My Spirit”?



Pick a self management tool from this handout and begin to develop that skill. Like any skill, active self-management must be learned and practiced. Make weekly **Action Plans** to help you make small changes that you can live with. And share your action plan with someone who can encourage you and be supportive.



ACTION PLAN

Weekly Steps

- Decide what you would like to accomplish. Be specific.
- Start by taking small steps. Make an action plan for what you will accomplish this week.
- Do your best to carry out your plan.
- Check the results. Think about how you can problem solve any barriers that keep you from accomplishing your action plan.
- Make changes as needed. **Focus on your progress** and make new action plans each week.

My Action Plan

This week I will:

(What? Write down a specific action you will take.)

(How much? Write down how much you will do, or how many times this week.)

(When? Write down the time of day you will do it.)

(How many? Write down the days you will do it.)

How confident are you?

On a confidence scale of 1-10, circle the number that indicates how confident you feel about being able to successfully complete your plan.

Not Confident 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6.....7.....8.....9.....10 Totally Confident



For more help with action planning and Strengthening Your Spirit, consider signing up for a “Help Yourself” workshop. To find out about classes in your area, check with your doctor’s office or go online at <http://selfmanagementonline.org> and click on “CDSMP.”



Source: This handout is a version of *Strengthen Your Spirit: Self Assessment and Tools for Healthy Coping of Negative Emotions*, which was adapted from the Stanford Chronic Disease Self Management Training Program for use by the *Help Yourself* Chronic Disease Self Management Program at Marshall University School of Medicine in Huntington, WV, and the New River Health Association in Scarbro, WV.