Depression can feel overpowering sometimes, but there are ways you can fight back. Village Employee Assistance Counselor Katie Figuerres sat down to discuss steps you can take to battle this common condition. But, first off, Figuerres is quick to point out that these tips are not a replacement for seeing a professional. If you are struggling with mood, see your doctor or contact your EAP at 1-800-627-8220.

Avoid the chemical pitfall – When you’re down, it can be tempting to turn to alcohol or a drug. But, in reality, it often “compounds” the problem, Figuerres says. Mood can suffer, and additional emotional, physical, and legal problems can result. Of course, medication prescribed by your doctor is a different matter and is very helpful for some people.

Just do it – Often, depression tells you to do nothing. Your energy is low. Things don’t seem as interesting as they used to. But here’s the secret: Doing nothing often makes you feel worse. It’s a downward cycle. You can combat that cycle by doing something even when you don’t feel like it. If we go ahead and take a healthy step (like exercising, going out with friends, etc.), “more times than not, we find that we’re going to feel some kind of positive effect,” Figuerres says.

Enjoy successes and don’t over-expect – You felt good about exercising twice this week until that little voice inside said, “Yeah, but you skipped two workouts.” Don’t go there. Feel good about what you did, and let it go at that. Even if you find “the tiniest bit of"
happiness, it’s still progress,” Figuerres says. And that’s something you can build on!

**One thing at a time** – When you’re down, looking at a mountain of work can be paralyzing. But, remember, big jobs are just lots of small jobs put together. Break big jobs into individual tasks, and do one thing at a time. You’ll feel a sense of accomplishment, get things done, and avoid the trap of inactivity.

**The cold months** – Even though it can be tempting to hibernate during those long winter months, Figuerres says it can be really helpful to discipline oneself to go ahead and go outside for a walk, run, or other activity. The sun exposure can help mood, and the exercise gets “those endorphins released,” she says. Also, a light therapy box can be helpful, Figuerres says.

**Eating better** – Diet can affect how we feel. Heavy carbohydrates, for example, tend to make us feel more lethargic. In general, eating better is good for the body, mind, and mood.

**Be social** – Just like inactivity can exacerbate depression, so can social isolation. So spend time with family and friends even when that voice inside is whispering, “Just stay home alone.”

**Watch the caffeine** – Excessive caffeine intake can be a problem. It can interfere with sleep and affect adrenal levels. “I think it goes back to ‘Everything in moderation,’” Figuerres says.

**Challenge negative thoughts** – When you feel depressed, you can imagine some pretty negative things. “You don’t have any friends” or “Your boss is fed up with you.” When that happens, ask “What evidence do you really have for that?” Figuerres says. Chances are the criticism is greatly exaggerated or just downright wrong.

If you’re struggling with your mood, contact The Village EAP. Counseling sessions are included in your benefits at no cost to you. Call 1-800-627-8220 for more information.

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**Depression, From Front**

“...spend time with family and friends even when that voice inside is whispering ‘Just stay home alone.’”

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**Counselor Column, From Front**

Loneliness, and anger. Though, bear in mind, the CDC reports that the majority of older adults are not clinically depressed. It is possible through a lifetime of experiences that older individuals may have developed positive ways to manage challenges.

Noticing when strong negative emotions don’t improve is important because people who have depression may not notice their mood has changed. And, sometimes asking for help can seem difficult.

Seek professional advice if you notice one or more of the following:

- Your elderly loved one has depression symptoms that are not improving and that interfere with their regular routine on a daily basis
- The individual is withdrawing from personal interactions
- They are no longer engaging in activities that they used to enjoy.

Some things you can do to help include talking to the person about depression and what you’ve noticed, offering to attend appointments with the individual, helping with small duties that they may struggle to complete, and spending time doing things together.

(Information for this article is referenced from: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); psychologytoday.com; mayoclinic.org.)

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