

Coping with Breakup Depression

Objective

To increase your coping skills to manage breakup depression.

What to Know

Stressful life events like romantic breakups and divorce can significantly impact your emotional wellbeing, triggering sadness, anger, bitterness, regret, anxiety, and stress. All these emotions are normal after a breakup, but if they lead to prolonged feelings of sadness and apathy, there might be something more serious going on. Researchers actually found that “normal” post-breakup emotional states closely resemble clinical depression.

Feelings of grief and sadness can be mild to severe following a breakup. Sometimes these feelings are strong for a brief period of time, but in other cases symptoms linger. Because emotional responses vary, it might be hard to tell if what you are feeling is normal or something more serious. Post-breakup symptoms that may indicate depression include:

- hopelessness or helplessness
- body weight changes
- change in appetite
- sleeping too much or too little
- loss of pleasure and interest in activities you previously enjoyed
- feeling worthless
- sadness or feeling “empty” inside
- intense self-blame or guilt
- fatigue and lack of energy
- listlessness
- apathy
- loneliness
- restlessness or irritability
- body pain, headaches, or stomach problems
- trouble thinking clearly or making decisions
- loss of self-esteem
- thoughts of death or suicide

Are you experiencing any of the above symptoms? If so, list them.

The good news is even if you are experiencing any of the above symptoms, they usually begin to subside on their own around six months after the breakup. As time passes, you will begin to

recover and gradually feeling better. Whether you are having normal post-breakup sadness or clinical depression, there are steps you can take to cope.

- Give yourself time to grieve the loss of the relationship.
- Avoid checking up on your ex on social media.
- Avoid your ex, or limit contact as much as possible right after the breakup.
- Set thought boundaries to avoid rumination (when you repeatedly think about something). Gain some control over your thoughts by reserving only a certain amount of time each day to process the breakup.
- Meditate and focus on the present moment.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes per day, five days per week.
- Avoid isolating yourself. Connect with others in-person, by text, or in a video chat.
- Look to the future and find a sense of purpose.
- Form a strong social support network.
- Practice good self-care habits.
- Learn problem-solving skills.
- Work on improving your confidence and self-esteem.
- Set goals.
- Write about what you are feeling, things you are grateful for, and positive experiences.
- Find ways to stay occupied to keep your body and mind busy.
- See a therapist, counselor, or relationship coach to help you gain perspective, address negative thought patterns, and establish coping skills.

If your symptoms get increasingly worse, you are using alcohol or drugs to cope, or you are considering suicide, contact your doctor or call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

If your symptoms are mild to moderate, you may be able to handle them on your own by practicing the above steps.

What to Do

Choose some of the above activities to try over the next month. Using the following chart, write down your experiences. Include the date, describe what you did, and note how you felt after doing the activity.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did practicing any of the activities decrease your feelings of depression? Explain.

What was your favorite activity? Will you continue this activity? Why or why not?

Who is supporting you during this difficult time? Has it been helpful? Why or why not?

After completing this exercise for one month, would you say your symptoms have decreased? Explain.

What else can you do to feel better following the breakup?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
