

Working with Mood Dips

Everyone's mood rises and falls throughout the day. Most of the time we don't pay much attention. We feel a bit more anxious or discouraged, and then it passes. When you have had a recent bout of serious anxiety or depression, though, two things are different.

- First, your mood is even more up and down than usual. When you are well your mood might decline into moderate sadness. During depression it can drop into intense despair.
- Second, you may get more alarmed than usual at changes in your mood. You may worry that small changes mean *"the problem's coming back"* or *"it's getting worse."* You might picture yourself sinking into a pit of depression.

These ideas can be frightening or depressing to think about, and so your mood *does* get worse. Then it seems like you were right (*"it is coming back"*), which is even more alarming, which makes you worry more, which makes the mood worse still. This is a snowballing bad mood.

What should you do when you find your mood dropping, then? First, remember that worrying, interpreting the drop (*"This means I'm going to feel awful for the rest of the week"*) and resisting the drop (*"Oh, no, I **can't** feel this way!"*) all tend to make the problem worse. Instead, try to accept the change in mood as a normal part of the recovery process. Allow the lower mood to sail on your emotional river. Recognize that it isn't there permanently.

Then carry on with the other activities you had planned for the day. Avoid giving in to the mood and becoming inactive, as this usually makes it worse. Focus on activities that you normally enjoy, or tasks that will bring you closer to your goals. If you had planned to do a month's grocery shopping today, then perhaps with your lowered mood you will not feel up to it. Go to the store anyway, but do the shopping for just a few days instead. Push yourself to do something that normally you would find enjoyable: a walk in the park, lunch with a friend, a bath with a magazine. Don't let yourself completely off the hook for your duties, but be nice to yourself as well.

Meet mood setbacks with acceptance and activity.

When your mood dips, what could you tell yourself that would help to make it less alarming?
