

Having Fun

"I used to think that if I was struggling, straining, and sweating I must be doing the right thing, and that anything easy, fun, or pleasurable was 'shallow' and not worthwhile. When I look back on it I think this idea was guaranteed to make my life miserable."

Having fun? Stress, anxiety, and depression are serious problems that require serious solutions. Aren't they? Don't they?

Few strategies are more important in resolving anxiety and depression than having fun. When people become anxious or depressed they tend to give up the things that they normally enjoy. They often have less energy than usual and feel that they have to use all of the energy they have left on productive activities. Fun is seen as a time-consuming frill that they can't afford. This is a serious problem. Why? *Because having fun gives you more energy than it takes.*

If you have been having mood problems, your energy reserves are probably low. Removing the things that you normally enjoy can feel like a way of conserving your energy for more important tasks. In reality, giving up enjoyable activity *reduces* your energy in the long run. Ask a non-depressed person to do as little as many depressed individuals do – to have as few social contacts, to get out as little, and to give up many of the activities he or she enjoys. What will happen? He or she will likely begin showing signs of depression.

Conclusion: *Fun is not an option. It is important!* Although you may have many priorities in your life, it is *essential* that you make room for at least some of the activities that you used to enjoy. Some people report that creative activity (such as artwork, music, writing, or crafts) seems particularly helpful, because these activities can engage your attention fully, allowing you to "lose yourself" in the activity.

If you have been depressed or discouraged recently, you may have noticed that as your mood worsened you felt less like doing things. In other words, your low mood seemed to cause a loss of interest. This inability to enjoy things is called *anhedonia* ("no hedonism", or "no fun"). But once you are down, the lack of involvement feeds into the mood problem. This is one of the vicious circles of mood problems, what we call a *snowball*.

In overcoming this lack of involvement it is important to remember that you may not actually *feel* like doing the things you used to enjoy. Don't wait for your eagerness or interest to return before you get moving. They may not come back on their own. First you need to begin doing some of the things that you used to like. The enjoyment and enthusiasm typically come later.

What place does fun or enjoyment have in your life right now? Have you given it up recently?

Some people never learned to value enjoyment in their lives. Have *you* ever been much good at having fun? If so, when was that? If not, what do you think stopped you?

Name four activities you used to enjoy but haven't done lately:

1.

2.

3.

4.

There may be some items on this list that you enjoyed, but that might not be great for you right now (for example, going to a pub). Of the ones that would do you no harm, which one would be the easiest to work back toward? Or is there something else that you would like to try?

How could you pare this down to something manageable? For example, perhaps you used to like drawing for eight hours at a stretch. You might be able to do it for ten minutes the first day.

The first time you get back to an old activity you may not enjoy it much. In fact, you may find it quite unpleasant. Remind yourself that the first few times are the most difficult, and that you are just getting used to the activity again. Give yourself permission *not* to have a good time. Usually the old enjoyment creeps back in after a while – especially if you haven't been looking too hard for it.