

When dealing with depression, it's important not to do it alone. As part of your self-care plan, you need to have a support system drawn from the caring, helpful people in your life – those family members, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and acquaintances who make it easy for you to be yourself.

If you are suffering from depression, the last thing you may want to do is socialize. But isolation can be a vicious cycle – the more you avoid contact with others, the more depressed you are likely to feel, and the more you will continue to withdraw. Building and maintaining a strong support system are vital steps in overcoming that cycle. The people you choose to include can provide encouragement and help you challenge negative thoughts.



Benefits of a support system

Research shows that a network of socially supportive people offers:

- **Accountability** – being accountable to someone else is a key factor in making successful lifestyle changes. Accountability should be a two-way street: in sharing your goals and progress with someone else, encourage them to share their stories with you.
- **Improved physical and emotional health**
- **Better problem-solving skills**
- **Enhanced “brain fitness”** – from a book club to a golf league, interacting with others helps you stay mentally sharp.

Building your support system

At first it may be hard to reach out to people and ask for help. But connecting with others is vital to your recovery. Remember: you don't need to share the details of depression with everyone in your life. Who you choose to confide in is entirely your decision.

When building your circle of support, consider the following:

- **Who should you include?** Focus on including those people in your life who have shown they can be sympathetic and non-judgmental, and exclude those who tend to be overly critical or make you feel anxious. If you don't currently have a strong social network, it's never too late to start. Even if you start building your network just with the professionals involved in your treatment, it is important to begin to trust and share your recovery with others.
- **Which environment is best?** Some people may prefer the formal setting of a support group led by a trained professional. Others may be more comfortable sharing in an informal gathering of one or more friends.
- **Should you share with co-workers?** Each circumstance is different. Although today there is much greater awareness of depression as a treatable disease, stigma still remains about brain illnesses.
- **How can you stay engaged?** Look for opportunities to stay involved in the lives of others, through recreational, leisure, or faith-based groups, volunteer opportunities, classes, or other activities you enjoy.

For more information:

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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