

Antidepressant Calendar

“Nothing.” That’s how people with depression usually answer when asked what they do all day. But is it really possible to do nothing? Probably not. Depression makes people *feel* like they’re doing nothing, but that feeling may not be as true as it seems. Even surfing the internet is doing something. So is lying in bed. Depression can also convince people that they have no power to make decisions – that things just happen to them and they play no role in the events of their lives. Sound familiar?

This exercise will help you notice what you’re doing throughout the day. From that knowledge, we’ll work to understand how those actions affect you and build a lifestyle that will lessen depression. But that’s getting ahead of things. For now, start off the first week by just *noticing* how you spend your time – without changing anything.

Week 1: Look at what’s happening

For the first week, record how you actually spend your time each day. You can use the daily calendar provided on page 102, which is broken into half-hour chunks. The goal is to leave no blanks or “nothings.” Thinking is an activity, so if you are lying in bed and worrying, write “in bed worrying.”

Week 2: Look for antidepressant action

During the second week, think about the main reason behind the things you do. Common ones are:

1. “I enjoy it.”
2. “It’s a responsibility I have to take care of.”
3. “It’s a step toward something better in my future.”
4. “It’s part of my beliefs and values.”
5. “I was avoiding uncomfortable feelings or a difficult situation.”

The first four reasons are called *approach* because you’re moving toward something, while the last one, #5, is called *avoidance*. Depressed days are often filled with avoidance, but approach is an antidepressant. Use a colored marker to highlight the half-hour blocks where you were in approach mode. If you can’t figure out the reason, or it’s a mix of approach and avoidance, we’ll talk more about it in session.

Week 3: What’s the outcome?

During the third week, continue to record your activities and the reasons that drive them. In addition, make a rough guess of how each activity influenced your mood or your life using the following coding system:

- + : Improved my life or mood
- : Worsened my life or mood
- +/- : Mixed results – it did some good, some harm
- ? : Unsure

It's okay if there are a lot of activities marked as "unsure." Depression can make everything feel the same, both the positive and the negative. If that's the case, think about how the activity affects your life rather than how it makes you feel. Talking to your child's teacher about their school problems probably won't lift your mood, but confronting it instead of avoiding it is likely to improve your life. Give that one a "+".

Weeks 2-4: Advanced planning

By now you should have a list of activities that improve your life, lift your mood, or are pursued with approach rather than avoidance. The section on "Antidepressant Activities" (p. 123) will help you add to that list and give you a few things to sample. Now it's time to start planning them.

For the upcoming week, add a few activities from that list to your calendar. Start slow, and add just enough activities so you can complete them without getting overwhelmed. If you can't keep up, add less. If you're checking off your list with ease, add more.

The calendar will also help you tackle complex tasks that you've been avoiding. First, break the task down into smaller steps. Then, add those steps in one at a time. For example, let's say you have been putting off getting the sink repaired. First, schedule a time to research and find a list of plumbers. Then, schedule a time to call the plumbers and find out who can do the job for the right price. Finally, schedule a time for them to come and fix it.

Troubleshooting

"It's too much to do."

Most people don't complete the whole calendar. That's okay. You can still make progress if you do it half-way.

"I can't think of anything to schedule."

In the beginning, it's good to choose random things to schedule as you experiment and find out what works for you. The section on "Antidepressant Activities" will give you some ideas.

150 Ways to Beat Depression

Constructive Ideas

Exercise
Work in a garden
Clean your room
Write a poem
Wash your car
Reorganize your room
Plant a tree
Decorate your room
Work on your car
Clean out one closet
Learn to draw
Clean something
Get to work early
Try a new, easy recipe
Organize your apps, bookmarks, or bookshelves
Practice a sport, karate, or yoga
Work on a photo album
Plan how to lose weight
Throw out old papers
Gently stretch your muscles
Take a class in something that interests you
Read the Bible or a spiritual text
Plan your career
Plan how to save money or get out of debt
Recycle old items
Make plans for finishing school
Give things to a charity
Organize your playlists
Complete a task (any task)

Relaxation

Take a warm bubble bath
Practice breathing slowly
Practice mindfulness
Go buy an ice cream cone
Walk in the rain
Think about things that you've accomplished
Sit by a warm fire
Eat a strawberry
Walk barefoot on soft cool grass
Eat a slice of fresh-baked bread
Find a quiet place to sit outside and enjoy nature
Make a list of things you are thankful for
Sit in a coffeehouse and read
Have breakfast in bed
Buy yourself a rose
Walk on a scenic path in a park
Drink some hot cocoa, tea, or cider
Write in your journal
Pet a friendly dog or cat
Have a manicure or pedicure
Stop and smell some flowers
Think about finishing school
Try a food you've never tasted

Wake up early and watch the sunrise
Watch the sunset
Relax with soothing music
Play your favorite music and dance to it by yourself
Go to bed early
Sleep outside under the stars
Fix a special dinner for yourself
Go for a walk
Light candles
Sing or whistle around the house
Pray
Take a sauna
Daydream
Laugh
Give yourself more time than you need to accomplish whatever you're doing
Get a massage
Take a cozy nap
Listen to your favorite CD
Get a facial
Have a day with nothing to do
Paint your nails

Fun, Travel, and Entertainment

Go see a film or show
Go to a pet store and play with the animals
Visit a zoo
Visit a town you've never been to
Explore a new hobby
Go rent a funny video
Go out to your favorite restaurant
Go to the beach
Take a scenic drive
Buy new clothes
Browse in a book or record store for as long as you want
Buy yourself something special that you can afford
Go to the park—feed the ducks, swing on the swings, and go down the slide
Visit a museum or another interesting place
Work on a puzzle book or adult coloring book
Go dancing
Research your family tree
Read a book
Go bowling or skating
Go shopping
Start an aquarium
Go to a sporting event
Learn a magic trick
Go fishing
Play cards
Bake cookies
Take some pictures
Plan a day trip

Throw snowballs
Learn to needlepoint
Go swimming
Watch a ballet
Read or memorize a poem
Listen to a symphony
Read a story curled up in bed
Look at a work of art
Do something you've never done before
Feed the birds
Memorize a joke
Go on a picnic
Take a different route to work
Play solitaire
Window shop on your favorite street
Play a board game
Learn to sail, canoe, or ride horses
Do a crossword puzzle
Shoot pool
Plan an easy, restful vacation
Listen to books on tape
Go out to your favorite restaurant
Look through travel brochures and dream
Visit your local library and browse the shelves
Take pictures of your family
Write your life story
Plan a hike or camping trip
Read magazines or newspapers

Social

Call a good friend
Play in intramural sports
Go to church or a prayer group
E-mail a friend
Smile
Practice listening to others
Plan a surprise birthday party
Meet new people
Join or start a book club
Plan lunch with a friend
Go on a date or spend time alone with your partner
Make a gift for family or a friend
Watch children play
Do volunteer work
Get involved in a club
Teach a child to fly a kite
Take acting lessons
Say something nice to someone
Play with a toddler or baby
Write a note to a far away friend
Freely praise other people
Tell a friend how much you appreciate them

Read more: *Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time*, by ME Addis and C Martell. New Harbinger Books, 2004

Client Worksheet

Daily Calendar

DATE:	Activity	Avoidance or Approach?	Outcome (+,-,+/-,?)
7:00 a.m.			
7:30 a.m.			
8:00 a.m.			
8:30 a.m.			
9:00 a.m.			
9:30 a.m.			
10:00 a.m.			
10:30 a.m.			
11:00 a.m.			
11:30 a.m.			
12:00 p.m.			
12:30 p.m.			
1:00 p.m.			
1:30 p.m.			
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10:30 p.m.			
11:00 p.m.			
11:30 p.m.			
12:00 a.m.			