

## Antidepressant Activities

The following section describes activities with inherent antidepressant qualities, including absorbing activities, exercise, brisk walking, contact with nature, and the mindful use of electronic media.

### Absorbing Activity

Depression is not “all in your head,” but depression can fill a person’s head with painful stuff. Ruminative worries, self-criticism, scorn, dread, and doubt. It’s hard to turn these thoughts off, but an absorbing activity can help clients get out of their head. These include activities like riding a bike or playing a game, where it’s hard to think about anything else while doing them. The following list describes some other qualities that create absorption. Absorbing activities need not fit all these criteria; just one will do.

1. **Time flies.** When someone is absorbed in the moment, they lose their sense of time, no longer thinking about the future or the past. They don’t watch the clock, wondering when it will be over.
2. **Lack of self-consciousness.** The person’s focus is on other people, the outside world, or a greater cause, rather than on themselves. They are too absorbed to worry about their inner state, and if someone asks how they’re feeling, they might not even know the answer.
3. **Challenging enough.** Absorbing activities give people a sense of competence about what they are doing. If there are obstacles, they can be overcome, and it’s not filled with frustrations and failures. On the other hand, the activity is not so easy as to be boring.
4. **Sensory involvement.** Absorbing activities directly engage the senses: sight, sound, smell, movement, or touch. Examples of these activities include cooking, sports, music, knitting, and bird watching.
5. **Clear goals and instant feedback.** It’s easier for people to keep focused when they know what they’re aiming for and can see where they’re going. In painting, every stroke changes the picture; when cleaning, every motion removes a little more dirt. Cooking, sports, web design, and playing musical instruments are other good examples. Tasks that feel directionless and uncertain are unlikely to hold a person’s attention very long.
6. **Slightly addictive.** Absorbing activities are slightly addictive in that the more someone does the activity, the more they want to continue doing it. If their family calls them to dinner, they’ll probably reply, “Just a minute, I’m in the middle of something,” or they might not hear their family at all. If it’s a book, it’s a real page-turner. If it’s a show, it’s worthy of binge-watching.
7. **For the love of the game.** When someone engages in an absorbing activity, they enjoy it for its own sake, rather than the outcome. Even if the computer doesn’t get fixed, they still liked tinkering with it. Shopping for garden supplies is a small pleasure even if they didn’t find the seeds they were looking for. Activities that involve learning, creativity, and skill-building tend to fall into this category.
8. **A higher cause.** Absorbing activities serve a purpose that’s greater than our own needs and desires. Whether someone volunteers at an animal shelter, plays games with their kids, or reads a religious or spiritual text, they do it because they value the cause, regardless of how it turns out.

Use the following two worksheets to help clients identify activities they find absorbing.

# Absorbing Activities

When you are depressed, it's common for your mind to stir with rumination, worry, and self-doubt. The most effective way to pull yourself out of these depressive thoughts is to do something that fully occupies your mind. That is, to engage in **absorbing activities**. Although depression makes it hard to get absorbed, practice will help. What are things that you used to enjoy, were good at, or found engaging? Look back to times when you weren't depressed and think of activities that you found absorbing. The following list gives you some ideas to get you started.

- A lively conversation with a friend
- Playing sports, a board game, or a puzzle
- Comedy or entertainment
- Binge-watching a streaming series
- Researching, such as on the Internet
- Spiritual or religious activity
- Music or dance
- Engaging with pets or animals
- Gardening, hiking, or spending time near bodies of water
- Doing an art project, cooking, or knitting
- Riding a bike, exercise, or walking
- A warm bath
- Reading a book that's a page-turner
- Other:

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# Antidepressant Activity

Some activities can worsen depression, while others help fight it. What makes the difference? Antidepressant activities tend to be absorbing, engaging, and share at least some of these qualities:

1. Time flies when you engage in the activity.
2. You are not focused on yourself while doing it but, rather, on the activity itself.
3. It is challenging enough to hold your attention, but not so challenging as to be overwhelming.
4. It directly engages your senses (e.g., sight, touch, smell, taste, and hearing).
5. It provides you with clear goals and quick feedback.
6. It is slightly addictive. The more you do it, the more you want to do it.
7. You enjoy the activity for its own sake, rather than the outcome.
8. It serves a purpose greater than your own needs and desires, such as volunteering.

Looking back at your answers from the "Absorbing Activities" worksheet, use the chart on the next page to write down all of the activities that you identified as absorbing. Then, check off which qualities these activities fulfilled for you. From that list, choose a few to plan on your calendar at a specific date and time. Good choices need not have all eight qualities; just one will usually suffice.

