

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION · ARTICLE 3

WHY CAN'T I SNAP OUT OF IT?

A COMPASSIONATE EXPLORATION

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Introduction

"If I just tried harder, surely I'd feel better."

It's a thought many people living with depression have said to themselves. You may have heard it from others too: "Pull yourself together," "Think positively," "Just keep busy," or "You've got so much to be grateful for."

Although these comments are often well-intentioned, they can leave people feeling misunderstood, guilty or ashamed. If recovering from depression were simply a matter of willpower, most people would choose to feel better immediately.

The reality is that depression is far more complex. It affects the way your brain, body and emotions work together, making it impossible to simply "snap out of it."

Depression Changes More Than Your Mood

Depression doesn't just make you feel sad. It can change the way you think, process information, make decisions and respond to the world around you.

Many people notice that everyday tasks suddenly require far more effort than they used to. Getting dressed, replying to an email or deciding what to eat can feel overwhelming. This isn't because you've become lazy or unmotivated. It's because depression affects the mental processes needed to plan, organise and act.

Imagine trying to drive a car with the handbrake on. The engine is running, you're pressing the accelerator, but moving forward feels incredibly difficult. That's often how depression feels. The desire to move forward may still be there, but something is making every step much harder.

Why Positive Thinking Isn't Enough

Positive thinking has its place, but depression cannot usually be overcome by simply changing your thoughts.

When someone is depressed, their brain often becomes more focused on noticing problems, mistakes and potential threats while finding it harder to recognise positive experiences. This isn't a conscious choice. It's part of how depression affects attention, memory and emotional processing.

This is why being told to "look on the bright side" can feel frustrating. It overlooks the fact that depression is influencing how the brain processes information.

Recovery isn't about forcing yourself to think positively. It's about gradually creating the conditions that allow your brain and body to recover.

Why Willpower Isn't the Problem

Many people with depression judge themselves harshly because they believe they should be able to push through.

In reality, depression often reduces mental and physical energy. Activities that once felt automatic now require conscious effort. Even making a cup of tea or getting into the shower can feel like climbing a mountain.

Needing more effort to complete simple tasks doesn't mean you've become weak. It means your brain is working much harder than usual just to get through the day.

Showing yourself compassion during these moments is far more helpful than criticising yourself for struggling.

What Can Help?

There is no quick fix for depression, but there are effective treatments and strategies that support recovery.

Many people benefit from:

Speaking to a GP or mental health professional.

Talking therapies, such as counselling or psychotherapy.

Medication where appropriate.

Breaking tasks into small, achievable steps.

Maintaining gentle routines rather than expecting perfection.

Spending time with supportive people, even if only for short periods.

Allowing yourself to rest without seeing it as failure.

Recovery often comes from many small changes rather than one dramatic breakthrough.

Common Misconceptions

"People with depression just need to be more positive."

Depression is a health condition, not a mindset that can simply be switched off.

"If you're laughing, you can't really be depressed."

Many people continue to smile, joke and support others while privately struggling. Outward appearances don't always reflect inner experiences.

"You're choosing to stay stuck."

Nobody chooses depression. Recovery takes time, support and patience.

Reflection

Think about the way you speak to yourself on difficult days.

If a close friend was struggling with depression, would you expect them to recover simply by trying harder? Or would you recognise that they needed understanding, support and time?

Perhaps you deserve that same compassion.

Key Takeaway

Depression is not something you can simply "snap out of." It affects the way your brain, body and emotions work together, making everyday life feel much harder than it once did.

Recovery is not about becoming stronger overnight. It is about understanding what you're experiencing, reducing self-blame and taking small, manageable steps towards healing.

A gentle reminder

This resource offers general information and reflection. It is not a diagnosis or a substitute for individual medical or therapeutic care. If you are worried about your safety or someone else's, seek urgent professional support.

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