

7 Ways to Lift Yourself Out of Heavy Thoughts

By [Deepak Chopra, M.D.](#) Posted on [May 15, 2017](#) in the Chopra Addiction and Wellness Center Newsletter



Everyone can occasionally find themselves prey to heavy thoughts, which is a natural response to emotional sadness and anxiety. Forcing yourself to be positive under every circumstance is a constant strain and undesirable as a realistic view of life. If heavy thoughts keep returning, however, and begin to attach themselves, you need to know how to lift yourself out of the gloom. (We aren't talking about long-term depression and anxiety, which require medical attention.)

The actions for overcoming heavy thoughts are always open to you. They fall under the category of coping skills. If you have few coping skills, you will be affected by external forces, and the mind's roaming fears and doubts. If you have strong coping skills, you will have strong boundaries and resilient emotions. This is why two people can go through the same crisis, and one will be crushed while the other bounces back. The better you can cope, the less influence heavy thoughts will have over you.

1. Catch Your Negativity Early

Once you are sunk deep in gloom or anxiety, it's more likely that you will find it hard to lift yourself up. So be on the lookout for the [first signs of negativity](#). As soon as you spot a mood shift toward irritability, anger, frustration, worry, or pessimism, pause immediately. Take a few deep breaths and center yourself. Let the emotion pass, and get yourself somewhere quiet and pleasant, such as going outdoors for a walk.

2. Avoid External Stressors

Dark thoughts usually occur under stress, and if you can, you should get away from the stressor, whether it's a negative person, a tense situation at work, or bad news on TV. Dark thoughts set in when they are reinforced, so don't let anyone or anything reinforce your bad mood if you have the choice to push back.

3. Develop a Supportive Inner Dialogue

About 75 to 80 percent of people talk to themselves in their heads, and a small minority even hear inner conversations. When the voice in your head starts saying things that induce worry, fear, anger, guilt, shame, or lack of self-esteem, pause for a moment, and say to the voice, "That's not me anymore." Repeat until the dark thoughts depart. You might also try, "I don't need this anymore. It doesn't serve me."

4. Keep Company with Positive, Optimistic People

We all have friends and family members who are downers. They are pessimistic or complaining; they insist on seeing worst-case scenarios and failure around the next bend. Inertia keeps you from walking away from these people, and sometimes you're stuck in situations you can't escape. But you can cultivate friendships with positive, optimistic people. Sociological studies have shown that you are more likely to adopt positive attitudes and behavior if you keep company with friends who already display them.

5. Try a “Thought Replacement” Strategy

A technique that lies at the heart of cognitive therapy (an approach that addresses thoughts and beliefs rather than feelings) is to question negative thoughts by asking if they are actually true. For example, if you are beginning to feel frustrated and think, "What's the use? Things never work out," test these thoughts against reality. You say to yourself, "Actually, things sometimes do work out for me. I have succeeded by persevering. This might be one of those situations."

The secret here is to be specific and honest with yourself. When any negative thought arises, you challenge its validity. Instead of "No one loves me," you replace that thought with "My mother loves me, and my good friends. I'm not helping myself by exaggeration and self-pity." Once you get accustomed to a thought-replacement approach, you'll be amazed at its effectiveness. Moods follow thoughts, which is why discovering that your bank account is bigger than you thought makes you cheerful, while discovering that your credit card balance is twice as high as you thought makes you feel uneasy.

6. Practice Being Centered and Detached

Being [detached](#) can be a positive state; it's not the same as being indifferent or bored. Instead, you are centered inside yourself, which allows you to view situations as a witness, without being swayed or emotionally rattled. Detachment develops naturally through the regular practice of meditation, because once you experience the centered, quiet, unshakable level of your mind, you easily learn how to return there at will.

7. Get “Sticky” Emotions to Move

Negative feelings have a mind-body connection, which you can feel physically. After a bout of getting angry or crying, it takes a while before your body settles down. This is due to various hormones, the stress response, and other biochemicals that do not clear immediately. You can help the clearing process by various means:

- Taking deep steady breaths
- Lying down and resting
- Walking outside
- “Toning,” the technique of letting spontaneous sounds arise as they will (low groans, moans, shouts, etc.). This technique must be demonstrated in person to get the knack of it.
- Deep, repeated sighs

Everyone needs to have a set of coping skills, and these are among the most useful and effective. Heavy thoughts don't have to cloud your day. You have good choices for how to lift yourself out of them.