



## ACTIVITY AND MOOD

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### YOUR TYPICAL WEEK

Take a few moments to bring to mind what you do during a typical week. In the spaces below, jot down 10 of the activities that make up your life at home or at work. An example has already been entered for you. See if you can break down big chunks of activity—such as “work” or “housework”—into smaller parts, such as “talking to colleagues,” “e-mails,” “preparing meals,” or “doing the laundry.”

- 1 Taking a shower
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Now, considering each of these activities in turn, ask yourself these two questions:

1. Does this activity lift my mood, energise me, nourish me, make me feel calm or centred, or increase my sense of being alive? If you answer “yes,” put the letter N (for “nourishing”) next to it.
2. Does this activity dampen my mood, drain my energy, or decrease my sense of being alive? If the answer is “yes,” put a D (for “depleting” or “draining”) next to it.

If you feel undecided and ‘it depends’ comes to mind, go with your initial reaction or put down N/D or D/N, or consider ‘What does it depend on?’

**Although very simple, this exercise reminds us of something very important:**

***What you do affects how you feel.***

***Most important: You can change how you feel by changing what you do.***

## THE EXHAUSTION FUNNEL

Alice had a busy life with plenty of commitments. She had worked hard to achieve her role within the public health team of her local authority, had two daughters at secondary school, and was also a trustee for the local community hub and foodbank. In her spare time, she enjoyed singing with her local choir, walking her dog with two girlfriends, date nights with her husband, going clothes shopping with her teenage daughters, book club, and weekly yoga classes.

Over the last few months, things had got particularly hectic. Alice's mother had been unwell, and there had been trips to the hospital to manage, as well as organising support for meals, housework, and personal care. Alice's eldest child was studying for their GCSEs and seemed anxious and overwhelmed by the amount of after-school study. Work was also very busy – there had been a restructuring and her boss had delegated more responsibilities to Alice as other members of staff had been relocated or decided to leave. The foodbank was also under pressure. More local people were struggling to make ends meet, and donations seemed to be dwindling.

Alice had noticed that she was feeling increasingly tired and that her stress levels were rising. At times she was feeling anxious about how she was going to fit everything in and her mood was beginning to drop. She had suffered from depression in the past. She wondered what she could do to free up more time and reduce the pressure on her busy schedule. What choices do you think she made?

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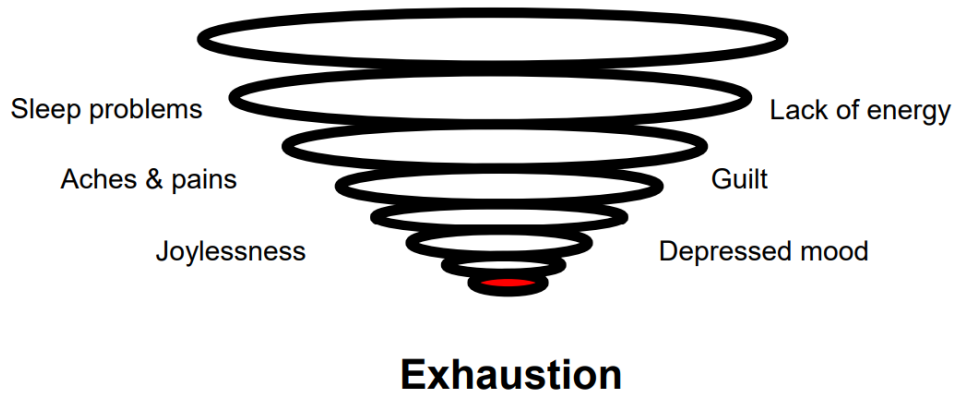
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Whenever Alice's mood began to sink, and she felt her energy was just draining out of her, she consciously adopted a strategy of giving up her "unimportant" and "nonessential" leisure activities, which actually gave her pleasure, such as walking the dog with friends or just going shopping with her daughters for fun. As she saw it, this strategy made sense because it meant that she could focus her dwindling energies (which she viewed as a strictly limited fixed resource) on her more "important" and "essential" commitments and responsibilities.

This is understandable, except that her essential commitments included being the perfect homemaker, wife, mother, daughter, and employee, as well as, of course, meeting all the demands and expectations of extended family, friends, colleagues at work, and the foodbank, her boss - whether or not these were reasonable or realistic. In giving up the "nonessential and unimportant" leisure activities that might have lifted her mood and replenished rather than depleted her reserves of energy, Alice deprived herself of one of the simplest and most effective strategies for reversing a decline into deeper levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.



The 'exhaustion funnel' illustrates a process that can follow when our mood goes down and we feel depleted. The narrowing area of the circles illustrates the narrowing of our lives as we follow the tendency to give up the things in life that we enjoy but that seem 'optional'. The result is that we stop doing activities that would nourish us, leaving only work or other stressors that often deplete our resources.

Professor Marie Asberg suggests that those of us who continue downwards are likely to be those who are most conscientious, or those whose self-confidence is closely dependent on their performance, i.e. those who are often seen as the most hard-working. The diagram also shows the sequence of accumulating 'symptoms' that may be experienced, as the funnel narrows and we become more and more exhausted.

## **REBALANCING DAILY LIFE**

The good news is that if you are actually present in the moment, and able to make mindful, informed decisions about what you really need, you can turn activity into a simple yet powerful way to raise mood and enhance well-being. There will be some aspects of your life that you simply cannot change for now. But, you do have some options. Consider...

- Of the nourishing activities, how might I change things so that I make more time to do these things more often, or become more aware of them when I do?
- Of the depleting or draining activities, how might these be done less often, or handled more skilfully?

To make the most of this strategy, it's important to remember what the "The Office" exercise revealed: the same activity can have very different effects on your feelings, depending on a number of other factors such as your current mood, the meaning you attach to the activity, and unhelpful thoughts that arise. If we are not fully aware of these factors, the actions we take to lift our mood will not necessarily have the effects we intend.

## ACTIVITIES THAT HELP: MASTERY AND PLEASURE

Research has revealed the encouraging truth that skillful use of activity, by itself, can be an effective treatment for depression. When people feel down, exhausted, and lacking energy, it turns out that two types of activities are particularly effective ways to lift mood:

- 1. Pleasure activities:** these are things that give a sense of enjoyment or pleasure—like calling a friend for a chat, taking a long, hot, leisurely bath, or going for a walk.
- 2. Mastery activities:** these are things that give a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, or control—activities like sending an email, tidying a room, or doing something you’ve been putting off. Mastery activities may not be pleasurable in themselves, but something in the world is different after doing them.

It’s important to know there is a two-way relationship between mastery and pleasure activities and feeling down:

- On the one hand, these activities can lift mood, but
- On the other hand, as your mood gets lower and lower, you’re likely to enjoy them less and you’ll probably get less satisfaction from them than when your mood is more balanced.

It’s easy then to think that these activities have little to offer. But, even when you’re low or depressed, you can take advantage of the link between mood and mastery and pleasure activities. How do you do this?

Step 1:

Consider your day-to-day experience to discover the mastery and pleasure activities that are already in your life. Having these tools available in advance means they are there for you when you need to use activities to cope with low mood and depression. Reflect on your own experience and begin to make a list of 10 pleasure (P) activities and 10 mastery (M) activities. It’s okay to use activities you identified as Nourishing (N) in the earlier exercise—the important thing is to make a start (and you don’t have to get all 10 right now!).

Step 2:

Now that you’ve identified your list of M and P activities, the next step is to consider how to weave them into the fabric of your life right now, while your mood is relatively good. Building mastery and pleasure activities into your life before you get stressed out, exhausted, or depressed means:

1. They are there at your fingertips to lift mood as soon as you notice your mood sinking.
2. Your everyday life will be happier and more satisfying.

Two ways to Weave M and P activities into your everyday life:

- Strategy 1: Build the activity into your daily or weekly schedule
- Strategy 2: Link M and P activities to responsive 3-Minute Breathing spaces.

**MY LIST OF PLEASURE ACTIVITIES**

E.g. Visit a friend, watch something funny or uplifting on TV, listen to music, have a nice hot bath, treat yourself to a favorite food.

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**MY LIST OF MASTERY ACTIVITIES**

E.g. Write an email, pay a bill, clean a room, do something I have been putting off

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## INTENTION IS THE KEY

In depression and low mood, motivation works backward. How things work differently in depression:

1. When your mood is healthy, you will feel motivated to do something and then you will do it. But, when mood is low, the reverse happens. Actions must come first before motivation is activated.

Hint: Beware of the common thoughts that might get in the way of taking skillful action (see below) It's best not to wait until you feel like doing something before actually doing it— see if it's possible, instead, to do it anyway and see what you discover.

2. When you're not depressed, if you're tired, rest can refresh you. When you're depressed, resting can actually increase tiredness.

Hint: it's best not to give up on activities to rest whenever you feel fatigued—see if it's possible, instead, to “stay in the game”—carrying on with activities, perhaps even briefly increasing activity—even if your mood and thoughts seem to say “no.”

## THOUGHTS THAT STAND IN THE WAY

- I'm tired now so I'll feel tired for the rest of the day
- Other people's needs are more important than mine
- There's no point starting this unless I can finish it
- I should always do things really well
- Everyone else would do this activity better than I'm doing it
- I'm not the person I was
- It's better not to talk to anyone about how I'm feeling, it might upset them
- I should be able to cope with this
- I can't do this as well as I used to
- How am I going to get everything done, I've got so much to do

Now feel free to add some of your own.....

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