

7 Ways to Combat Depression

After a Spinal Cord Injury



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A spinal cord injury can be incredibly traumatic. It can impact your life from the ground up, with changes in your health, finances, and relationships. Depression is not uncommon, especially in the months following the injury.

Counseling and support groups can play vital roles in reducing depression. However, there are many other activities and ideas to keep in mind, even before you pursue rehabilitation. We have gathered important pieces of advice that have helped many spinal cord injury survivors on their road to recovery.

1. Stay active.

Depending on your injury type, this can mean anything from sitting up unassisted to holding brushing your teeth. It is critical to remain active to your fullest ability, with guidance from a care provider. You certainly want to avoid activities that can cause complications. If you are considering a rehabilitation facility, be sure to ask about supplemental activities, both outdoor and indoor, which can stimulate your mind and body.

2. Don't play the "what if" game.

"What if I had left just 5 minutes earlier?" "What if I had bought another car instead?" Many people fall into this cycle of thinking and that's ok. The important part is to minimize this type of thinking. You need to shift your attention to the future and save your energy for rehabilitation.

3. Retain some self-sufficiency.

Understand that it may be necessary to have others help you out for certain activities. However, if it is possible to do a task yourself, try to do it. It is incredibly easy to slip into a lifestyle that makes you entirely dependent on others. Even if it's not a large task, exercising your motions can have a positive effect on your physical and mental health.

4. Avoid self-destructive behavior.

Some people grieve and withdraw for longer than others. This is a normal part in rehabilitation, but keep in mind that your emotions can affect this process. If you engage in self-destructive behavior, including alcohol and substance abuse, you risk stopping or reversing any recovery that you have made. You can also isolate yourself, alienate loved ones, and miss out on positive activities.

5. Maintain personal goals.

For those who are newly injured, motivation for rehabilitation and therapy can come a lot easier. At first, it can be hard to believe that your injury is anything but temporary, even through physical therapy. While complete recovery is rare, it is not uncommon for individuals with spinal cord injuries to regain some of their body function.

Achieving motivation can be difficult for those who have been living with a spinal cord injury for years. A common roadblock is losing track of rehabilitation goals. Studies have shown that spinal cord injury survivors who are goal-oriented are less likely to be depressed and more likely to gain a level of acceptance.

6. Get your loved ones involved.

Many rehabilitation centers and outreach groups offer counseling sessions for friends and family members of individuals with spinal cord injuries. Remember that your loved ones also go through the grieving and acceptance process. By getting them involved, you can provide them with the tools and knowledge to turn them into your biggest supporters.

7. Arm yourself with knowledge.

Many parts of depression are the result of misinformation or irrational beliefs. Your doctors and care providers will do their best to provide you with information. However, they can't answer questions that you do not ask. Staying informed can help you create positive goals and take a stronger role in your rehabilitation.

Remember that you ultimately have control of your life. It is up to you to choose how to think about your situation. Happiness, hope, and motivation do not happen on their own – you have to work to make it happen. Take time to grieve and understand your injury, but make the effort to move beyond it. Your future now is what you make of it.

Here is an inspirational passage from John C. Maxwell's "25 Ways to Win People." It's a very apt quote that should be taken to heart by everybody in the world.

BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF NEARLY TEN THOUSAND PEOPLE, GARY HELD OUT A CRISP FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL AND ASKED THEM, "WHO WOULD LIKE THIS FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL?" HANDS STARTED GOING UP EVERYWHERE. "I AM GOING TO GIVE THESE FIFTY DOLLARS TO ONE OF YOU," HE SAID, "BUT FIRST LET ME DO THIS." He proceeded to crumple up the bill. Then he asked, "Who still wants it?" The same hands went up in the air. "Well," he continued, "what if I do this?" He dropped it on the ground and started to grind it into the floor with his shoe. He picked it up, all crumpled and dirty.

"Now, who still wants it?" Again, hands went into the air.

"You have all learned a valuable lesson," Gary said. "No matter what I do to the money, you still want it, because it doesn't decrease in value. It is still worth fifty dollars."

Gary's simple illustration underscores a profound point. Many times in our lives we are dropped, crumpled, and ground into the dirt by the decisions we make or the circumstances that come our way.

We may feel as though we are worthless, insignificant in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. But no matter what happened or what will happen, we *never* lose value as human beings. Nothing can take that away. Never forget that.

Before you reach acceptance, you must remember that you still have value. You are a unique human being, with amazing potential. Your body's state does not take away from this fact.

For information about local recovery centers or support groups, please visit www.spinalcordinjurylawyer.org. Should you have any further questions, please call us toll-free at 1-866-523-1603. Our firm has built up a strong rapport and network of spinal cord injury specialists throughout the years. If we cannot assist you, we will do everything in our power to connect you with somebody who can.

