What to Do When You Are Starting to Get Depressed (Dysthymic)

* Catch it early…notice if there are 3 consistent days of lowered mood in a row…THEN…
* Refer to your well-being plan and the early warning signs you have nominated – then think about your plan to address these symptoms and start putting it in place straight away.
* Get help before things get out of hand. Do not hesitate to call your psychologist, psychiatrist or GP to get in for an appointment as soon as possible.
* Consider your PRN medication for mood enhancement and consider increasing your dosage of mood stabiliser or SSRI – but ensure you have your doctors approval FIRST.
* Use your support system. Let your supporters know how you are feeling. Talk with them for as long as you need to, expressing all the emotions that come up. Ask for help.
* Get out of bed. Doona therapy is the worst thing you can do. As hard as it is, try not oversleep or go back to bed for the day.
* Don’t oversleep – sleeping more than 8-10 hrs can lower our energy and mood.
* Get into the shower first thing in the morning. Having a warm shower gives you an immediate serotonin release and will help you stimulate yourself to get into the day. After the shower get dressed into your best clothes (not your pjamas!), do your hair, make up, shave, brush your teeth etc. Feeling groomed and doing your basic self-care = feeling better! Remember “fake it till you make”
* Remember the skill of OPPOSITE ACTION i.e. do the opposite of what you feel like doing. When you want to avoid, APPROACH. When you want to sleep, get out of bed! Etc.
* DON’T ISOLATE – try as much as you can to get out of the house, call friends, go to the coffee shop, go to work, seek social connection as much as possible.
* Get moving! Increase your EXERCISE immediately as well as the intensity. If you can seek out HIT (high intensity training or workouts – can make a difference in these moments) rather than yoga, run fast instead of walking, lift weights etc. Train every day rather than every second day etc.
* Seek sunlight. Exposing yourself to direct sunlight (stare into the light as much as you can without sunglasses) so that the light hits your retina and pineal gland – this increases serotonin production. Go for the double whammy of exercising in sunlight to really increase your levels.
* Where possible structure your day with rewarding and engaging activities. Seek out pleasurable activities that will give you a sense of achievement and enjoyment. See a funny movie, a friend that makes you laugh, etc. Listen to your favourite music.
* Avoid alcohol – alcohol is a depressant.
* Avoid excessive sugar intake. Try and eat regular meals. Do not skip meals. Do not eat too much of one thing. Try to restrict heavy carb loading and emotional eating. Low GI foods and protein can help with energy levels.
* Try to not cancel your regular activities and schedule. Pushing yourself as much as you safely and realistically can to keep your daily routine will help. This is called “Behavioural Activation” and can make a difference in the early stages of a low.
* Get into the ocean (a swim in salt water is another way to get an immediate serotonin release) , walk by the sea, walk into nature, walk around the park.
* Cultivate gratitude. Focusing on the positive things in life and what you are grateful for in the smallest ways has been shown to increase mood.
* Try a meditation session, guided meditation track or slow breathing exercise.