Module 4
Healthier daily routines

Depression very often affects the basics of daily life – sleep, eating, exercise, and socialising. Problems in these areas then in turn quickly reinforce the downward spiral of depression. Making small changes to build healthier daily routines can make a very big difference to how you feel. This gives depression less opportunity to entrench itself in your life.

Contents
1. Monitoring your daily routines
2. Sorting out sleep patterns
3. Understanding food & mood
4. Increasing exercise
5. Checking alcohol & drugs
6. Practising relaxation
7. Connecting with others

Monitoring your daily routines

Daily habits to do with sleep, eating, exercise, alcohol and drug consumption, relaxation and socialising do not operate in isolation – eating and exercise can affect sleep patterns, and sleep patterns can in turn affect motivation for exercise or socialising, for example.

This workbook module helps you identify the aspects of your daily routine which may be reinforcing or exacerbating your depression and then to plan ways to improve these daily habits as a better barrier against depression.

A very useful first step is to use a ‘Daily routine diary’ to keep a record of your sleep, eating, exercise, alcohol & drug consumption, relaxation habits, and social contact over the course of a week. Although this is a time-consuming task it can provide you with some useful (and sometimes surprising!) information about how your daily habits are affecting you.

See the individual worksheets for what aspects to focus on for each of the daily habits.
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<th>Day:</th>
<th>Sleep (waking, bed, sleep times &amp; quality)</th>
<th>Food (brief food notes with times eaten)</th>
<th>Exercise &amp; relaxation (type, length of time etc)</th>
<th>Alcohol &amp; drugs (units/amount, including caffeine &amp; nicotine)</th>
<th>Social contact (who, when, how long, quality of contact)</th>
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Further notes:
Sleep difficulties are a common problem associated with depression. Depression is known to disturb sleep, and disturbed sleep patterns are also a vulnerability factor for depression.

There are some simple strategies that you can use to gradually improve your sleep habits – but the most important thing to do is avoid rigid expectations or getting too stressed about sleep disturbance. This worksheet will help you plan and make small, gradual changes to work towards better sleep hygiene.

1. Keep a sleep diary

The first step is to keep a sleep diary for a week or two, so that you have a realistic snapshot of your current sleep habits. Note down:

- what time you wake up
- how well rested you feel
- how you rate the quality of your sleep last night
- what time you get up
- timing and content of meals and snacks
- any consumption of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol or other drugs
- engagement in physical activity or exercise
- relaxation activities
- what you were doing before going to bed
- conditions in the room when you went to bed (temperature, noise, air quality etc)
- what time you went to bed
- what time you turned out the light (if different)
- how long it took you to fall asleep
- whether/how long you were awake during the night

Consider:
What have you learnt from keeping your sleep diary? Roughly how many hours of sleep are you averaging per night? What quality is your sleep/how well rested do you feel? Have you noticed any patterns for when sleep is better or worse?

My sleep summary:

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“Lectures didn’t generally start until late and so I’d be getting 11 or 12 hours sleep or something ridiculous and getting up late and it led to me feeling more lazy; like I wasn’t doing anything with my time; just sleeping or lounging around in bed.” – Daniel
2. My new sleep routine

Read the notes on the ‘Sorting out Sleep Patterns’ page about better sleep hygiene and look at your sleep diary to see whether there are ways in which you could improve on your own sleep habits.

Write down your intentions for how to improve your sleep habits:

*Example:*
I will get up by ___8am___ every day, including weekends.

I will aim to go to sleep by ___12pm___ but only if I am sleepy by then.

One hour before bed I will ___switch off my laptop, close the curtains/put on my lamp, have a bowl of cereal or a milky drink and have a chat with my housemates, read a novel or listen to my relaxation CD for 20 minutes___

I will only go to bed when I am feeling sleepy.

If I am having trouble getting to sleep I will ___get up and turn on the lamp, write down any thoughts that are bothering me so that I can sort them out in the morning, carry on reading my novel until I am sleepy again___

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

___Put my alarm clock on the other side of the room, and ask Josh to bang on my door if I’m not up by 8.15___

___Get up and get dressed straight away, and plan an activity to get up for every day___

___Buy some ear plugs so I don’t worry about being disturbed if my housemates come in late___

My sleep routine intention statement:

I will get up at ___________________ every day, including weekends.

I will aim to go to sleep by _______________ but only if I am sleepy by then.

One hour before bed I will _____________________________________________________________
If I am having trouble getting to sleep I will

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Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

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3. Evaluation

Don’t set yourself overly rigid expectations – the aim is to make sure you generally give yourself the best chance of a decent amount and/or quality of rest. It won’t always go to plan, but that is not the end of the world. Work on other aspects of your daily routine, like exercise and relaxation strategies, to support the changes you are trying to make in your sleep habits. Use the diary to check your progress after a while.
Understanding food & mood

Poor food choices and irregular eating habits can contribute to mood swings and intensify depression. Choosing healthier foods and paying attention to eating routines can make a significant difference in steadying mood.

This worksheet will help you to evaluate how your food and eating choices may be affecting your mood and then to plan any changes to improve your mood through making healthier, more constructive choices.

1. Keep a food diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of your daily eating habits, making note of the types of food, rough portion size, and any notes or comments in relation to your thoughts and feelings about what you are eating. Try to keep the diary for at least a week. Don’t change anything yet, just record things accurately without judgement at this stage.

Consider:
What have you learnt by keeping a food diary? Are you eating regular, healthy meals and snacks on the whole, or do you think you need to make some changes to take care of your body’s needs better? Did you notice any patterns connecting food and mood, such as irritability as a result of blood sugar ‘crashes’?

My food and mood summary:

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“Eating more healthy foods is another strategy – I like to try out food that has been shown to reduce depression. It also gives me a chance to try something different with cooking, and as I personally enjoy cooking it helps me reduce stress levels.” – Leigh

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2. My better eating options

Read the notes on the ‘Understanding Food & Mood’ page about healthier food choices and eating patterns. Write down a range of healthy breakfast, lunch, supper and snack options to suit your budget.

| Breakfast options       | 1.  
|                        | 2.  
|                        | 3.  
|                        | 4.  
|                        | 5.  
| Lunch options          | 1.  
|                        | 2.  
|                        | 3.  
|                        | 4.  
|                        | 5.  
| Supper options         | 1.  
|                        | 2.  
|                        | 3.  
|                        | 4.  
|                        | 5.  
| Snack options          | 1.  
|                        | 2.  
|                        | 3.  
|                        | 4.  
|                        | 5.  
| Other ideas and notes for better eating habits |

If you are compromising on food due to money pressures then you might benefit from reading one of the many useful books aimed at students advising on eating well on a budget. If you are truly suffering deprivation then see your campus financial office for advice and possible access to hardship funds.
3. My food & mood plan

Write an intention statement for how you plan to improve your food choices and eating habits.

Example:
(Breakfast) I will ___ eat breakfast every morning, choosing from my list of healthy choices
(Lunch & snack) I will ___ make myself a healthy sandwich for lunch before I go out to lectures, and also pack a piece of fruit and some nuts for a snack, so that I don’t get tempted to buy crisps and chocolate at the Student Union
(Supper) I will ___ plan a cooking rota with my housemates so we take turns to cook a healthy meal to share
(Snack) I will ___ have a milky drink or bowl of cereal as part of my wind down routine before bed

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:
___ Plan out my shopping budget and buy the foods I need to make healthy choices
___ Speak to my housemates about the cooking rota
___ Make sure I don’t get too rigid about it, and allow myself a few unhealthy choices in moderation, so I don’t feel restricted.

My food & mood intention statement:

(Breakfast) I will _____________________________

(Lunch & snack) I will _____________________________

(Supper) I will _____________________________

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

4. Evaluation

Don’t set yourself overly rigid expectations – the aim is to make sure you have a generally balanced and healthy diet. It won’t always go to plan, but that is not the end of the world. Work on other aspects of your daily routine, like exercise and relaxation strategies, to support the changes you are trying to make in your eating habits. Use the diary to check your progress after a while.
Increasing exercise

Exercise addresses several of the factors causing depression, including the brain’s mood chemicals. Even very moderate exercise can make a big difference to your mood. Increasing enjoyable exercise is one of the most effective strategies for tackling depression.

This worksheet will help you evaluate your current levels of activity and plan enjoyable ways to increase your activity and exercise levels, as an important strategy to combat depression as well as improving your health and wellbeing generally.

1. Keep an exercise diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of your daily physical activity and exercise, making a note of how vigorous it was, how long it was and ratings of pleasure and achievement, plus any notes or comments relating to your thoughts or mood before, during and after the activity. Keep the record for at least a week.

Consider:
What do you notice about your activity and exercise levels? Do you notice any patterns relating to your mood? Is there room to increase the levels of exercise in your weekly routine? Are there any thoughts or attitudes preventing you from benefiting from this powerful depression-beating strategy?

My exercise evaluation summary:

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Brainstorm:
Read the ‘Increasing exercise’ page and brainstorm ideas for ways to increase the amount of exercise you do. Try to focus on exercise ideas which offer the possibility of enjoyment and/or social interaction, rather than those which you do not feel at all attracted to!

My ideas for exercise:

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2. My exercise plan

Decide which idea on your list would be the easiest and/or most enjoyable to try out. Write an intention statement to help you plan what, how, when, and where you will do to exercise more in the coming week.

Example:
I will ___ walk (what) the long way home through the park (where) after lectures on Tuesday and Thursday this week (when) with Tom, or listening to my ‘happy’ music while I walk (how).

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

___ Ask Tom if he wants to come with me ___
___ Make sure I put my iPod and umbrella in my bag for backup ___
___ Make a backup plan that if I miss doing this (eg if it’s raining too much) I will walk round the block later on instead. ___

My exercise intention statement:

I will __________________________ (what)
______________________________ (when)
______________________________ (where)
______________________________ (how/long)

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

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3. Evaluation

Don’t give yourself unrealistic or self-punishing goals. Take things gently and build up your exercise levels gradually. Choose one exercise aim at a time, and keep trying until you find something that works for you. Then build up to include a variety of exercise. Work on other aspects of your daily routine, like eating and sleep strategies, to support the changes you are trying to make in your exercise habits. Use the diary to check your progress after a while.
Checking alcohol & drugs

Using alcohol or other drugs to ‘self-medicate’ stress and emotional problems is a widely accepted part of student (and wider) culture, but can often cause problems. Realistic strategies for addressing problematic alcohol and drug use are an important strategy for combating depression.

This worksheet will help you identify and plan to address any problematic alcohol and drug issues which may be contributing to your depression.

1. Keep an alcohol & drugs diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of your daily alcohol and drug consumption, including caffeine and nicotine, being honest with yourself about units and quantities. Record notes or comments relating to your thoughts or mood associated with or following this. Keep the diary for at least a week in the first instance.

Consider:
Read the info on the ‘Checking alcohol and drugs’ page and consider its relevance to you in relation to the record you have kept. What do you notice about your alcohol and drug consumption? Do you notice any patterns relating to your mood? How much do you spend a week on alcohol and drugs? What are the pros and cons of your alcohol and drug use? Would you be able to admit it to yourself if there was a problem with your alcohol and drug use? What would it take to show you if there was a problem? Is it likely that alcohol and/or drugs are contributing to your depression in any way?

My alcohol & drugs evaluation summary:

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Brainstorm:
If your evaluation indicates that changes to your alcohol and drug use would be helpful, then what changes do you need to make? What would be the quickest and easiest change you could make? What would be a first step? Whose help could you call on for putting these ideas into practice?

My ideas for cutting down alcohol and/or drugs:
(eg. designating most week nights as alcohol free nights, with one ‘alcohol pass’ to join in with social occasions that come up; scheduling a different kind of social activity, like a sports club, for one or two evenings; on nights out using tactics like making every other drink a soft drink, assigning yourself as the designated driver, giving yourself a restricted cash budget etc; building up a new social group if your social networks are very drug or alcohol dependent)

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2. My alcohol & drugs plan:

Decide which idea on your list would be the easiest to put into practice. Write an intention statement to help you plan what, how, when, and where you will do so.

Example:
I will ___ have at least 4 alcohol free nights each week.

Things I need to change/do to give me the best chance of sticking to this plan:
___ Tell my friends that’s what I’m going to do and ask them to support me ___
___ Sign up to the badminton club and go to the club night on a Wednesday, instead of going to the pub ___
___ Give myself a strict alcohol budget for the week, so even if I go out with everyone else on an extra night I’ll need to stick to cheaper soft drinks ___

My alcohol & drugs intention statement:

I will ___________________________ (what)

______________________________ (when)

______________________________ (where)

______________________________ (how/long)

Things I need to change/do to give me the best chance of sticking to this plan:

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3. Evaluation

Don’t set yourself unrealistic goals. Aim to cut down and moderate your alcohol and drug use. If you find that this is too difficult, then consider seeking professional help. Use the diary to check your progress after a while.
Practising relaxation

Depression feeds off stress. Managing our stress better is one of the key things we can do to keep depression at bay. And the foundation for managing stress levels is knowing how to relax.

This worksheet will help you evaluate your current relaxation strategies and plan for introducing new relaxation techniques and strategies as a daily routine.

1. Keep a relaxation diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of anything you do during the day that you would normally count as ‘relaxation’. Record notes or comments relating to your thoughts or mood associated with or following this. Keep the diary for at least a week in the first instance.

Consider:
Read the info on the ‘Practising relaxation’ page and consider its relevance to you in relation to the record you have kept. What do you notice about your relaxation habits? Are you using constructive, positive ways to relax, or does your ‘relaxation’ leave you feeling drained and depressed? Which relaxation strategies worked best for you this week? Do you use or know how to use basic relaxation techniques?

My relaxation evaluation summary:
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2. Learning how to breathe

If you haven’t previously been introduced to basic relaxation techniques using controlled breathing and/or tension-reduction, then this is the first step. Use the info on the ‘Practising relaxation’ page to try out some simple exercises right now. If you find this difficult to do on your own then list here which methods you may be able to use to develop these skills, as well as any other ideas for introducing a self-nurturing ‘quiet’ time:

My ideas for learning and using basic relaxation skills:
•
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3. My relaxation plan

Choose a few of the simplest ideas to put into practice first (ensure that breathing practice is included, because this is such an important life skill for lifelong management of stress and anxiety):

Example:
I will practise my relaxation breathing every morning just after I have got out of bed (when), standing at the window (if it is light) or looking at a nature picture on my wall or laptop (where), for 5 minutes (how/long) ________

If I forget to do it or just for extra practice I will do a few breaths whenever I remember, wherever I am ________

I will do at least one of the following every day, with the conscious intention of practising relaxation skills:

____ Give myself a 30-minute ‘quiet’ time break, when I get back in from the library/lectures, and make myself a cup of tea and have a sit down and chat/read before I think about any other work or commitment ______

____ Go to a class or use online video instruction for yoga or tai chi relaxation ______

Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

____ Set a timer for the 30 minutes and make sure I have a plan for what I want to do straight after the ‘quiet time’ so I don’t just sit around all afternoon ______

____ See if Tom wants to sign up to do tai chi at the sports centre with me ______

My relaxation intention statement:

I will practise my relaxation breathing ________________________________
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If I forget to do it or just for extra practice I will __________________________
I will do at least one of the following every day, with the conscious intention of practising relaxation skills:

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Things I need to change/do to give me the best of chance of sticking to this plan:

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4. Evaluation

Once you have put your relaxation plan into action for a few weeks, use the diary to check how things are going and what strategies are working best for you. Choose something else off your list and try to build up a variety of relaxation strategies. Work on other aspects of your daily routine – in particular, increasing your ‘active’ or vigorous relaxation strategies, through exercise, is a very good complement to the other techniques. More vigorous exercise is an excellent outlet for excess stress hormones, and is an energising form of relaxation.
Connecting with others

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It is much easier for depression to take over when you are isolated and out of touch with others. Building relationships and support networks has been shown to offer significant help against depression.

This worksheet will help you evaluate your current levels of social contact and plan for including more constructive and beneficial social contact into your daily routine.

1. Keep a social contact diary

Use the Daily Routines Diary to keep a record of any social contact you have during your day, including even very small interactions like those with shop assistants or bus drivers. Record the quality of that contact (eg. did you exchange smiles with the bus driver or just avoid eye contact?) and any notes or comments relating to your thoughts or mood associated with or following each contact. Keep the diary for at least a week in the first instance.

Consider:
Read the info on the ‘Connecting with others’ page and consider its relevance to you in relation to the record you have kept. It is very likely that you will have been able to record unhelpful thoughts and attitudes which are contributing to you keeping you isolated. You can find out more about how to deal with these in the ‘Changing attitudes’ section.

For now you can just summarise what you have learnt about the patterns of your social contact. What do you notice about your social habits? Which social contacts had a positive effect on your mood? Can you identify times when you are tending to isolate yourself and what the effect of this is on your mood?

Evaluate your social contact in terms of its underlying motivations – on each occasion are you seeking positive, open connection with others, or are your social contacts complicated by concerns with status, ‘popularity’ or other unhelpful judgements?

My social contact evaluation summary:

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It is much easier for depression to take over when you are isolated and out of touch with others. Building relationships and support networks has been shown to offer significant help against depression.

This exercise may feel quite painful or difficult if loneliness or social exclusion have played a role in triggering your depression and/or depression has led you to isolate yourself. Try to undertake this observation stage with a spirit of curiosity rather than judgement.
Brainstorm:
Make a list of the people you come into social contact with on a regular basis, and how you can improve your connection with them. Add in new activities or clubs you could join in with to meet new people at the same time as pursuing an interest. Also add in the people in your wider circle of connection who you can make an effort to maintain contact with and could also open up to about how you are feeling (eg. friends and family back home).

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2. My social contact plan

Decide on a few of the simplest, least threatening ways to increase your social contact and connection with others. Include an example for relative strangers (eg. the librarian stamping your books), acquaintances (eg. people on your course you don’t know well), and people in your closer social circle (eg. housemates):

Example:
This week to improve my social contact and connection, I will:

1. Connect with a ‘stranger’ by: ___ Smiling and catching the eye of the supermarket teller when I do my shopping ___

2. Connect with an acquaintance by: ___ Speaking to someone in my tutor group about our latest assignment, to see if they also found it quite hard ___

3. Connect with someone close to me by: ___ Phoning my sister and asking how things are going with her these days ___

4. Make one step towards meeting new people by: ___ Checking at the Students Union for volunteering opportunities ___

You can improve the quality of connection even in fleeting social contact eg. by smiling and exchanging eye contact with the supermarket teller. Also bear in mind that people mostly respond well to friendly social contact, especially if you show interest in them and their experiences.
My social contact intention statement:

This week to improve my social contact and connection, I will:

1. Connect with a ‘stranger’ by:
   (when)  
   (where)  
   (how/long)  

2. Connect with an acquaintance by:
   (when)  
   (where)  
   (how/long)  

3. Connect with someone close to me by:
   (when)  
   (where)  
   (how/long)  

4. Make one step towards meeting new people by:
   (when)  
   (where)  
   (how/long)  

3. Evaluation

Make sure your initial steps are not too ambitious and make sure you reward yourself with recognition for attempting them however well or badly you feel they go. Check back after a few weeks to evaluate how you have done, and to give yourself new social contact goals.

You can build on these steps by doing the worksheet on the ‘Talking to someone’ page as well as looking at the ‘Building support networks’ section.