

A Guide to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression

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Depression affects millions of lives. It's something that can strike anyone at any almost age. The condition can be brought on by a life circumstance or without reason at all.

The extent of how people are affected depends on several factors - including the severity and treatment options available. One highly effective treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy.

What Is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

Cognitive behavioral therapy is one of the most often used treatments because of its high success rate among patients. The basis of this treatment lies with the science that it's a person's thoughts that are the controlling basis for his or her feelings.

Most people develop a certain way of thinking that guides his or her life. This pattern of thinking begins in childhood and continues to develop. By the time a person reaches adulthood, he has a distinctive pattern of thought.

The type of childhood, combined with the type of adulthood that a person lives, determines many different things about them. Thoughts about oneself that are harsh, critical or demeaning can be the foundation for negative thinking patterns.

These thoughts can darken a mood - even to the point of despair. They can also impact how a person feels about himself and how he believes others feel about him.

Those feelings then translate into actions and behaviors. If it's not changed, this way of thinking can lead to health issues. The purpose for

using cognitive behavioral therapy is to teach patients how they can begin to understand what their thought patterns are.

Most people, when they have thoughts, accept those thoughts as the truth even when they aren't. These untruths can impact a person who has depression in unhealthy ways.

The CBT treatment shows a person how to examine the thoughts they have to determine whether or not there is any factual basis to them. Once they evaluate the thinking, the purpose of this kind of therapy is to have the patient learn how to change the negative, destructive thoughts into ones that are truthful and benefit him mentally and physically.

The way a person thinks doesn't just happen overnight. When people grow up in an emotionally and mentally unhealthy way or develop the wrong kind of thinking in their lives, this dysfunction can easily become a pattern.

This can happen without any conscious effort at all. That pattern of thinking doesn't just remain as thoughts. It can then become a pattern of behavior and the person will think and will respond to situations concerning himself and others the exact same way every time.

The thinking, verbal response and reaction will yield the same results as well. Not only that, but when these thoughts and actions are rooted in negativity, it can darken the mood to the point that depression begins.

For people who are already depressed, their thoughts play into the symptoms. Once a person is caught up in this cycle of negative thinking and negative behavior, without intervention, it's extremely difficult to break free.

But when the negative thinking and actions are altered using cognitive therapy behavior, freedom from depression can be found. The therapy is effective even when other methods are not.

Why Choose CBT Over Other Treatments?

One type of therapy that's often recommended for people who are struggling with depression is therapy. While this is a good idea, the type of therapy that a person is introduced to will either treat his depression or it won't.

Regular sessions with a counselor who isn't trained in treating depression aren't effective. This is why not all therapy works. A therapist who treats patients for moods associated with depression but not the root of the depression is merely putting a bandage on a wound that needs greater intervention.

When it comes to treating depression, you can't simply treat the symptoms. When you do that, the depression will continue because it hasn't been addressed.

You have to get to the root cause. Going in to see a therapist and talking about the depression and the reasons you feel depressed isn't enough to actually make any changes in how you feel or in how you behave.

The reason that cognitive behavioral therapy is a better choice than other types of treatments is because it focuses on making a change to the cause of depression.

Though a person can be set in his or her thinking pattern, that doesn't mean it can't be changed and that's what cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on. It works to realign the thinking patterns that aren't correct.

The focus of the treatment doesn't stop with just helping a person alter his or her thinking, but it also works to guide the patient toward action steps. These action steps put the thought process changes into play.

By using cognitive focused action steps, the person who has depression is taught how he can triumph when dealing with the thoughts or behaviors that have caused him to spiral in the past.

Cognitive behavioral therapy doesn't start out by digging into a person's cause and effect when it comes to depression. This keeps the person's thoughts mired in what's gone wrong.

Instead, what the treatment does is it begins with teaching a patient the type of thoughts they're thinking and the difference in unhealthy versus healthy thoughts. During the treatment, patients learn to focus on the negative thoughts in order to identify those thoughts and the problematic behaviors that the thoughts can lead to.

These thoughts, once they're known to the patient, can then be dealt with. What's different and helpful with cognitive behavioral therapy is that people who battle depression set both short- and long-term goals.

These goals can help the patient be able to identify wrong thinking patterns and how to course correct. Without any identification of the thoughts, and without the correct treatment plan, most patients don't have any road blocks when it comes to their thinking or actions.

This is why depression can deepen quickly. The more the person leans on the negative thought patterns, the more ingrained they'll become. Cognitive behavioral therapy is different from other treatments because it helps the person recognize when this pattern emerges.

The patient is shown how the thoughts change how they feel and what they do. By giving the patient the ability to recognize what's going on in their minds and how that's linked to what they do, the person learns how to cope with life and the various situations he encounters.

Using this type of therapy, instead of getting overwhelmed and falling back into negative thought patterns, the patient is taught specific thinking skills that help him deal with his problems.

Through cognitive behavioral therapy, he learns how to enjoy life. The treatment is better than other treatment styles in that it guides a person toward taking action not only through the depression state during therapy, but it gives them skills so that they learn how to deal once the therapy has ended.

Unlike many other treatment methods, cognitive behavioral therapy aims to be a short term, but long-lasting effective treatment. The treatment time span usually lasts between three to four months.

What Type of Person Is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Right For?

Most anyone with depression can benefit from this kind of therapy. Studies have shown that it's one of the most often recommended and used therapies because the change in thinking patterns that are taught in the therapy can be applied over and over again to any situation.

Even people who have lived decades with dysfunctional thought patterns can be helped using the therapy. It's good for people who have struggled for weeks, months or even years.

It's helpful for people who don't want to take medication or for people who are on medication. It can be used for mild to major depression. In some instances, with people who are severely depressed to the point where they've attempted suicide, a more immediate type of intervention is needed over cognitive behavioral therapy.

Once the person is stabilized, they can benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy as well. In people who do have depression, the therapy is highly effective. It's so effective in fact that some people reach the point where they no longer need to take an antidepressant.

Some doctors suggest that patients who are struggling with depression seek this type of therapy. Not only is it right for adults, but it's also helpful and effective with both teenagers and children as well.

Studies have revealed that the therapy can help patients who haven't been able to find relief using other treatments. People who struggle with symptoms even when they're under a doctor's care and are on a prescribed treatment can use cognitive behavioral therapy.

The treatment is perfect for someone who wants relief from the symptoms of depression. It's useful for someone who desires to change their life and

it's helpful for anyone who's ready to take a more active role in the treatment of their depression.

Altering Negative Thought Patterns

In cognitive behavioral therapy, the heart of the treatment is to get the person to realize and recognize thought patterns. Only by recognizing or identifying them can they be changed.

Most people, especially those who have depression, allow their thoughts to have free reign in their minds. They don't realize that they're negative because they're so accustomed to them.

The link in understanding the fact that thoughts are impacting their moods is something that many people with depression don't grasp because of this unawareness and disconnection from the truth.

This is often referred to as automatic or faulty thinking. This can lead to a twist in what's actually real, so the person develops what he or she believes are facts when they're really distortions.

These distortions fall under many different headings. One heading that people with negative thought patterns use is known as a label. When a label is placed on something, it's then branded or predetermined that the person is identified by that label according to him or her.

In people with depression, that label is often unkind. It's always an untrue label such as stupid, dumb, ignorant and so on. Another distortion is overgeneralizing. People with negative thought patterns rarely ever say, "I messed up."

Instead, they'll say, "I'm always a failure." With overgeneralization, it's never a situation where something happens occasionally – instead, they believe it always happens to them.

They apply this distinction to themselves as well as the situations in their lives. Negative thinking also leads to blame shouldering. This is a thought turned behavior in which the person is constantly accepting the blame for

things that he doesn't have the power to make happen or stop from happening.

For example, he gets let go from his job because the company he worked for suddenly shut down. With distorted thinking, the person believes that he should have known it was coming - that it's his fault he doesn't have a job.

In truth, it was a circumstance he had no power to stop from happening. It had nothing to do with him at all. A negative thought pattern is also when someone projects from the point of the situation of reality to what they feel it should actually be.

This is known as should thinking. It can be identified in statements like, "I should have known better. I should have more money. I should be smarter. I should be richer."

Dealing in absolutes is another negative thought pattern. People who have this type of negative thinking can only see one way. They fail to realize that there are other ways to view a problem, themselves or life in general.

In negative thinking patterns, the person will often believe the worse thing is about to happen or they immediately believe that something bad has happened without verifying it first.

While this can be caused by situational fear, such as not hearing from a loved one while they're traveling and fearing that they've been in an accident, it's most often rooted in an established thinking pattern.

Someone who has negative thinking patterns will assume the worst is yet to come. They can't see the positive and don't believe that the outcome of something will be good.

They live expecting the bad to happen because it's ingrained in their thinking. Another negative thought pattern is when someone can't see the facts about a situation.

All they have is how they feel about it. People who have continual negative thoughts often have trouble controlling their emotional reactions to everyday situations.

You might see this referred to as being blown out of proportion or flying off the handle. Though it is an emotional response, the root is still found in the negative thought pattern.

The negative thought pattern is what leads to the emotional behavior. Cognitive behavioral therapy works to help a person be able to spot the faulty thinking and change it.

This is key to both preventing, treating and keeping depression at bay. This therapy teaches a patient how to recognize faulty thinking patterns. For example, someone who blew a job interview for a new job he wanted might say, "I can't do anything right."

The therapy techniques will show the person how this thinking is faulty by checking the thinking and verbal response. Using facts, not faulty thinking, the therapy teaches the person to look at what he has done right and what he has control over.

This action shows the person that he has done things right in the past, so it's not that he can't do anything right. This helps the person be able to isolate the negative thinking and behavior.

Blaming oneself and labeling oneself is a fallback strategy that's rooted in the faulty thinking that comes from the learned patterns. While there are plenty of people who can have negative thought patterns, it's worse in people who have depression.

It affects those people a lot more than it does someone who doesn't have depression. People who are struggling with depression don't consciously choose to have negative thinking in any situation.

It's a response that's ingrained to the point where they don't notice the thought or even put forth any effort to evaluate the thought. It just happens. People who have depression are often hindered by their

negative thinking because it causes them to turn their thoughts inward as well as to see the situation as negative.

Negative thought patterns and depression can give a person a very skewed way of seeing life in general. This is why people with depression can delve into the all or nothing type thoughts like, "Things will never get better."

They view themselves as the problem and they can't see the positive. It's always going to be the worst-case scenario. For example, someone who hears that jobs are going to be cut, will automatically think his is going to be one of them.

He may think this because his supervisor didn't respond to an email he sent that week, so he'll think the supervisor is going to end up letting him go. Ignoring that email was the first step in the firing.

That's how negative thought patterns go even though the person has no facts to back up that thinking. People with negative thought patterns will see themselves in the harshest light.

They'll believe they're not likeable even when they have plenty of friends. They'll think they're going to say something stupid so they'll keep quiet. The negatives become bigger and the positives become smaller or non-existent in someone who has faulty thinking patterns.

When something good happens in their lives, the person won't see the positives. They'll see what didn't happen and what could have happened and they'll beat themselves up over what didn't happen rather than being happy over the good that did occur.

What cognitive behavioral therapy does is teach a person the identification process of thought patterns and how they are the root cause of behaviors associated with thought patterns.

The therapy also teaches how the thought patterns are linked with depression and how all of it ties together to influence how he lives his life. What the therapy does once the person learns how to see that their

thinking patterns are faulty is to show him that there is a better way to view themselves and life as a whole.

Thoughts in Action

Cognitive behavioral therapy works for people with depression because it doesn't simply stop once it helps a person identify what's been going on inside his head. This is where many other therapies fail.

They identify the problem and then expect the person to "move on." People with depression know that that it's not that simple. You don't "move on" any more than you just "shake it off."

What you do is you learn how to deal with the condition that you have. There will be good days and bad days. What cognitive behavioral therapy can do is it shows patients with depression how the majority of their days can be good days and that they don't have to allow the condition to worsen because of wrong thought patterns.

With depression, one thing that some people do is they withdraw from life. They stop having fun, and they stop doing the activities that they once did. Cognitive behavioral therapy teaches people with depression how they can get back to doing what they once enjoyed.

They show people how they can cope with problems without spiraling out of control whenever something occurs. Most people don't recognize that depression is a condition that can actually feed on the symptoms it has.

For example, one of the symptoms is pulling away from people and things that they once found pleasure in. They just don't feel any excitement or desire toward any activities like they did before.

So they stop going and they don't do anything. But what they don't realize is that by stopping and withdrawing, it expands the symptoms, so they end up feeling worse.

This is where cognitive behavioral therapy differs from many other types of depression treatment and why it's so successful. It teaches people with depression that the things that they enjoyed need to be in their lives.

Part of the treatment plan involves making sure the person pencils in the time for the activity that they once loved. Or they have them pencil in the time for something new that the person might find fun.

Patients with depression will often not see a way around any issues that will keep them from returning to the activities that they once loved or experiencing new ones.

The therapy teaches them how to stop looking at the experiences as a whole, but to take action steps that lead that direction of change. During cognitive behavioral therapy, people are taught to write down what they do and how they felt during the activity.

This helps people understand how actions can change feelings. It also helps them see that taking action can lead to an improvement in their depression. The reason this is important is because doing nothing allows the symptoms of depression to grow.

The Parts of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

There are several ways that you can choose to apply cognitive behavioral therapy. One way is by going to a therapist for counseling sessions until you've completed the treatment.

Another way is by learning the therapy treatments online. Some people will choose to buy self-help books that teach the therapy while others will take a course or do audio therapy sessions in their home.

When you choose cognitive behavioral therapy, regardless of which method of delivery you take, the basic concepts remain the same for each one of the sessions.

When you begin, you'll take a look at where you are with your depression. This might involve determining if you're feeling anxious or irritable or if you're feeling disinterested in things around you.

This is an important part of the session. It helps you identify where you're at as a way of noting your progress as the sessions continue. Once you've identified your symptoms, you'll pinpoint the severity of your emotions on a scale of one to ten.

This is to determine if the depression is disrupting your ability to carry on in your day to day activities. Identifying this can help you scale your depression from mild to moderate to severe.

The scale of your depression can fluctuate - especially in the beginning of your sessions. In the session, the topic to be discussed is usually presented. If a patient is using cognitive behavioral therapy tools at home, then the topic is usually predetermined rather than decided at the point of the session.

A look back over what was accomplished in the last session or with the last lesson is usually reviewed. This review is done to simply remind the patient of the coping tools or discovery of the previous lesson.

After the look back is done, the patient is then ready to move on to the new session's topic. By looking back before looking to the new lesson, it paves the way for any information that's discovered during the new session.

The patient is then reminded of things like faulty thinking and can apply that in the new session. Most in person therapy sessions as well as courses at home will have work for the patient to do.

This can be something like identifying the areas of faulty thinking. It might be addressing a particular situation or emotional reaction to a situation. Working through the depression is part of the core of cognitive behavioral therapy.

This is why each patient should have some hands on activity or coursework to complete. The length of each session or course will depend on the counselor or the material that's used for each patient.

When Will I Be Done with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

In terms of therapy, most people who have depression fear that it's something they'll be doing for years. The truth is that there are some types of therapy that can and do last for years.

But that's usually for conditions that aren't depression related and which can't successfully be treated with cognitive behavioral therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy is a lifelong tool that can and has been used for the successful treatment of depression.

Though the standard treatment cycle is between three and four months, you will gain the coping skills that you need well in advance of that timeline. For most people, it takes six to eight weeks for them to acquire the knowledge that they need to be able to put the coping skills into practice.

How long you'll need the therapy can vary from short term to long, depending on the individual patient. There are some things that can affect when you'll be done. If you have any other conditions that are associated with your depression and how long you've been depressed, then that can factor into it.

Everyone's depression symptoms can vary, so that's something that can also come into play. How fast you seem to grasp the treatment and the amount of progress you make is another factor.

Any additional experiences can also be an issue - such as if you're in treatment while you're in a stressful life situation. The amount of help you receive from your social circle can also matter.

People who have a solid support system do better in therapy than people who have little or no support from the loved ones in their lives. But generally, you can expect to feel better within the first week.

Within a month, you can expect to have acquired the necessary skills so that you recognize faulty thinking when it occurs. The negative thoughts may still be present, but they won't go unnoticed by this point.

It's during the first month that you'll begin to see that you don't have the signs of depression as deeply as you once did. By the time you're in the second month of therapy, you'll notice that you no longer automatically revert to the same thoughts that you once did.

As you continue your growth in the cognitive behavioral therapy, you'll begin to use the coping skills to deal with situations or problems that arise that would normally send you into a spiral.

People who have a deeper level of depression may discover that they will struggle a little longer with learning the coping skills than people with mild or moderate depression.

One reason for this could be length of time without treatment, length of time with the wrong type of treatment or the ingrained beliefs involved. By the time all the sessions or lessons of cognitive behavioral therapy have ended, you'll be able to recognize the progress that you've made.

Some people believe that once they've gone through therapy for depression, it's a done deal and they'll never have to seek treatment again. With other types of therapy, that's just not true.

It's an ongoing process because some types of therapy don't give you the knowledge that you need to continually strengthen the skills you've learned. But with cognitive behavioral therapy, you do gain that knowledge.

With cognitive behavioral therapy, you'll learn to recognize the signs of the type of thoughts and behavior that bring about depression. Plus, with this type of therapy, you can get after care sessions.

These are sessions or lessons for people who have learned what they need to know, but just need to go over it again to strengthen their knowledge and help prevent any future issues.



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