Ask an expert: What should I do about feeling depressed at school — a NetWellness column
by Dr. Lawson Wulsin/University of Cincinnati

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Question: I’m currently in college working toward my bachelor’s degree. I have had a hard time adjusting to school and being away from home. I get depressed pretty easily. What type of things can I do to help my mood? How should I know when to see a doctor?

Answer: Depression is a treatable condition, but to treat it well often requires teamwork, persistence, and effort. The more you know about it, the more efficient your efforts can be.

Listed below are some ideas for addressing your depression:

**Keep track of your moods**

First, learn to monitor your moods. You can use a 0-10 scale, the PHQ 9, or the Beck Depression Inventory. If you’re ever down for most days during a couple of weeks, seek an evaluation at your student health center. You should know whether you have a clinical depression that requires treatment. You should learn whether depression runs in your family, and if so, what kind (is bipolar depression a risk for you?). Make lists of what activities or people get you down and what lifts you up.

**Manage your symptoms**

This week’s NetWellness column is authored by Dr. Lawson Wulsin, a professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Cincinnati.
Next, you want to try the common approaches to managing depressive symptoms and take notes on what works and what doesn't. Things to consider include regimens that affect:

- Exercise
- Diet
- Sleep
- Physical activity
- Social activity
- Relaxation training

Which of these you do, and how often, depends on your interests, abilities, and limitations. These are all part of daily self-management, which is often necessary to handle persistent conditions like depression or fatigue or pain.

Managing clinical depression

If you have clinical depression, you should develop these regimens as part of your comprehensive treatment plan, along with antidepressant medications or psychotherapy, or both.

The best summary of approaches to treating clinical depression is Getting Your Life Back by Jesse Wright and Monica Basco. Understanding these options opens the way to seeking the right treatments at the right time.

Get the help you need

How to proceed depends on what you learn about the patterns of your depression. For most people, depression is a tricky beast that needs to be studied and monitored carefully, often with professional help, at least in the early years.

Find out what resources your college offers for learning about depression and use them. If suicidal thoughts have ever been a feature of your depression, find a clinician and develop a plan for how you will manage them if they ever return.

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