

# Getting Started with Emotion Regulation for Depression

## *Overcoming Perceived Obstacles to Sensory Regulation in Depression Management*

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*Have you struggled to start a new treatment approach whilst suffering with a mental health condition?*

You are not alone. It is common for people with mental health struggles to feel this concern. It can be challenging when starting a new treatment for managing a chronic illness such as diabetes or asthma, just as it is difficult to start a new exercise program. The new approach may provide you with fresh hope, maybe a little excitement, but there is often apprehension whether the pay-offs will be worth the inconvenience and uncertainty of change to your lifestyle. Negative side-effects for you personally may be unknown. You may be worrying about how it will fit in with your work and home life? Will it have hidden costs which accumulate to make the treatment more expensive than you realized? Will it be time-consuming to implement?

On top of these concerns, you are faced with the challenge of depression symptoms and behaviours impacting your desire and ability to start a new approach. Your willingness to try new interests, tasks, visit new places, mix with people is at a low level. You may lack energy, motivation, and incentive to start. Your thinking may be that of catastrophizing and your belief that this treatment will be successful in helping you move towards recovery may be non-existent.

Specifically, there are **five** obstacles you may feel are blocking you from trying a sensory regulation approach and reasons why they are easily overcome:

1. ***Perhaps you feel your emotions are too scattered and unpredictable.***

Sensory regulation generates emotional regulation naturally and puts you back in control.

2. ***Anxieties arise that this will be too difficult for you to undertake or to incorporate into your daily life.***

It is reassuring to know that everybody uses sensory strategies throughout their day to self-regulate both consciously and subconsciously to manage their nervous system. You may not have been practicing self-regulation because people with mental health conditions often fail to identify their sensory preferences. This is about recognizing what your body needs and giving it this sensory input. This may be as simple as chewing gum to calm yourself or sucking on ice to raise your alertness. It is simply a part of a planned daily routine and incidental activities to help you regulate your body and your emotions.



**3. *You feel that you don't have the energy or level of alertness to participate in your previous interests.***

You will learn how to identify your arousal level in your body and then use simple sensory activities of your choosing to raise your arousal level to a state that allows you to engage in activities that you have previously enjoyed. Your level of alertness can then be maintained during the activity with further sensory stimulation that doesn't need to be costly, taxing in terms of your attention, or distracting, and can be subtle if you are with others if you do not wish to draw attention to your use of the sensory diet ideas.

**4. *You feel you will run out of sensory input ideas to self-regulate.***

Suggestions for sensory activities, known as a sensory diet, are available on this website. Sensory experiences are as vast as your imagination. Discuss ideas with a friend over coffee or whilst going for a walk or whilst your kids play in the park.

**5. *Perhaps performance at work is a worry for you. How would you self-regulate at work?***

Plan a sensory diet that is adaptable to all environments, indoors and outdoors. If one sensory diet idea doesn't work, try another. What works one day, may not work the next. Have a variety of sensory diet ideas on hand to use as needed. Identify sensory diet ideas that you can use incidentally if you become emotionally dysregulated unexpectedly. Create a sensory kit and carry it with you to work, the shops, to the kids' soccer training.

Take the first step in regaining your life and your personal identity as a fully functioning, capable, resilient, joyful person: **adopt a sensory approach in your daily lifestyle for sensory and emotion regulation.**

