

Avoiding depression after retirement

Some relish retirement with its free time to do just as one pleases. Others fall into a funk.

People who loved (or were accustomed to) their career can suddenly feel empty and lost minus the productivity and social aspects of work. Even those who disliked their jobs can feel so. While depression can creep in -- draining interest and enthusiasm in the form of melancholy, fatigue, restlessness, pessimism or a sense of hopelessness -- developing the right outlook and habits will help retired people lead happier lives.

First, prepare the mind

Be conscious that this big change in lifestyle can bring lows as well as highs. Being mindful of any mental/emotional sabotage is the first step to avoiding it. Step two is taking action to set a course for productivity and fulfillment – however you define them.

Before retiring, imagine how you would fill your time in a typical week or year, and discuss your vision with someone close.

Viewed as the opportunity to fulfill dreams and goals, retirement can be more rewarding. While the possibilities are many, putting structure to the possibilities can help with their realization.

Create structure and define purpose

By thinking about and deciding on your unique purpose and what you want to accomplish, you have a mental guide for each day. Pursuing a hobby, playing a sport, mentoring others, volunteering, helping your family, developing a skill, acquiring new knowledge... whatever it is, give it shape in your mind.

Cultivate an attitude of excitement to take on the day, because you're doing what you love.

When you create structure, purpose and direction – and a schedule – you have a familiar path to reach life goals.

Stay active and engaged

For many retirees, friendships fall away once the workplace connection is cut.

Social isolation and inactivity are destructive. At least some of a retired person's activities should be social, whether that means exercising at a gym, connecting with neighbors, volunteering at a charity, or even taking on a part-time



job that involves interacting with others. A partial list of suggestions includes:

- Taking college or adult education courses
- Mentoring students as a volunteer
- Sharing experience and skills – for example, retired business people can coach entrepreneurs through local SCORE chapters (score.org)
- Joining a local senior center or other social group and make new friends
- Getting involved in church or civic activities
- Spending more time with family (another good mentoring opportunity)
- Starting a part-time business – Internet-based businesses can provide excellent opportunities, even if it's just selling all those unused items in the attic, basement and garage on eBay
- Connecting with family and friends on social media such as Facebook



And if you have a spouse or friend who can join you, so much the better.

Take care of fundamentals

Of course, eating healthfully, exercising and getting proper sleep offer body and mind benefits.

Keep experimenting

Understand that happiness may require some searching. A first stab at a part-time job, for example, could be disappointing, and you might find you're not really the next great American novelist. Keep experimenting until you find something that clicks. When you do, you're not fighting depression; you're living with purpose.