

6 Things That Can Worsen Depression

By [MARGARITA TARTAKOVSKY, M.S.](#)
Associate Editor



There are many articles about things you can do to improve your depression. But what about staying away from those things that can make it worse?

“There are many things a person who lives with depression needs to be mindful of for better well-being,” according to Deborah Serani, Psy.D, a clinical psychologist and author of the valuable book *Living with Depression*.

Below, she shared six triggers that can exacerbate depression — and what you can do to minimize or cope with them.

1. Stress.

A surplus of stress spikes the hormone cortisol, Serani said. “Cortisol keeps us in an ‘emergency ready’ state, with states of arousal and irritability that tax our already fatigued body and mind.” To minimize stress, Serani suggested delegating tasks, dividing projects into digestible parts and learning to say no. “Above all, resist the tendency to take on too much at home, work or school,” she said. Check out these other articles on shrinking stress:

- [5 Ways to Stress Less](#)
- [6 Ways to Stress Less at Work](#)
- [10 Practical Ways to Handle Stress](#)
- [Therapists Spill: The Best Ways to Shrink Stress & Anxiety](#)

2. Sleep.

The relationship between sleep and depression is a complicated one. People with depression tend to have disrupted sleep. And people with sleep disorders – specifically insomnia —

seem to be more susceptible to depressive symptoms. Too little or too much sleep can aggravate depression.

“Making sure the architecture of your sleep cycle is predictable and sound will help keep depression symptoms from worsening,” Serani said. Consistency is key in enhancing sleep quantity and quality. Go to sleep and wake up around the same time every day, she said. And if you take naps, make sure they don’t sabotage nighttime sleeping, she added.

3. Food.

The relationship between food and mood also is complex. But some studies have suggested that certain foods are associated with depression. For instance, this prospective study found a link between trans unsaturated fatty acids and depression risk. Foods high in sugar or simple carbohydrates can spike glucose levels and mess with mood, Serani said. Alcohol and too much caffeine can make you more irritable and also boost blood sugar levels, she said.

4. Toxic people.

Serani described toxic people as “negative and corrosive.” They don’t grasp how depression actually affects your life, she said. Avoid interacting with these individuals altogether, or at least try to have others around who can temper their toxicity, she said.

And focus on having great people in your life. “Part of living with depression requires you to learn how to reframe negative thoughts into positive ones, so having people in your life that are affirmative, nurturing and accepting of who you are will help ground you in a better healing environment,” Serani said.

5. Media.

Upsetting and disturbing news and stories can exacerbate depression. “I know that my depressive symptoms worsen if I’m exposed to horrifying news, startling stories or dramatic films,” Serani said. She keeps up with current events by reading selective stories. Figure out what medium you’re most comfortable with. And learn your own signs that you’ve absorbed enough information, she said.

6. Anniversary reactions.

Around or on the date of a past traumatic event, some people experience the same distressing symptoms they originally felt. Events that might trigger an anniversary reaction include anything from a loved one’s passing to a stressful doctor’s appointment, Serani said.

She suggested readers “take a look at the dates on the calendar to raise awareness of any emotional days that may be coming up.” Knowing these days are coming up will help you better prepare for them, she said. For instance, let your loved ones know about potentially problematic days, she said. “See if they can check in on you or offer support in some way.”