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**FREE**  
**LIFESTYLE**  
**STRATEGIES**  
**TO HELP**

**MANAGE DEPRESSION**

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## About

*Dr. Andrea*

Dr. Andrea Thomas is a Pharmacist, Speaker, and Depression Breakthrough Strategist. She holds a Doctor of Pharmacy degree and believes in a multi-faceted treatment approach that addresses underlying issues often overlooked by conventional treatment models.

Her passion stems from navigating through her own health struggles, where she overcame depression and stigmas after applying biblically-based health principles focused on lifestyle modification. This experience caused a mindset shift from relying primarily on medications and dramatically altered how she applied health habits to patient care.

Her mission is to empower patients to strategically apply a multi-faceted approach that encourages lifestyle methods beyond medication to optimize vitality. Having been both a patient and a clinical pharmacist, she provides a unique perspective of viewing treatment from both perspectives and on how illness, medication, and lifestyle intersect. Her counseling skills enable her to clearly communicate complex concepts to motivate change.

# Why I created this ebook

As I interview on podcasts, speak, and share my story of how I navigated my own health journey to transition from relying mainly on medication to manage my depression symptoms, certain common questions and themes often come to the forefront. What strategies are out there that can help? What practices do you do now to maintain balance and well-being? You mentioned XYZ. Can you share more information about that? This is why I created this list: to serve as an information guide to encourage curiosity and insight into practices that are often overlooked. In my opinion, a multi-faceted approach to managing depression is best, as our body systems are interconnected, working together so that we may function optimally—emotionally, spiritually, physically, and intellectually.

The list is loosely grouped by categories. As you review this list, consider exploring two to three items that initially resonate with you, that would not seem overly complicated to initiate, or that you used to do but at some point had fallen by the wayside.

Review and discuss the list with your health practitioner. Explore if making adjustments in these areas causes a shift toward a noticeable improvement in your symptoms. Be patient with the process and continue to explore and implement additional strategies.

My hope and prayer is that you will see and feel the value and benefit of these adjunctive applications in not just your mental health but your overall health as well.



# Strategy Descriptions

## Lifestyle

- 1 **Aerobic exercise/movement:** Causes the release of natural feel-good endorphins (brain chemicals) that promote feelings of well-being and boost self-confidence. Keep in mind that the consistent frequency of exercise may be more beneficial than the duration of exercise; for example, 30 minutes four times per week may be more beneficial than 60 minutes twice a week.
- 2 **Sleep hygiene optimization:** Getting at least 7-8 hours of sleep nightly and minimizing blue light exposure in the bedroom are examples of ways to promote adequate deep sleep and REM sleep, which enhance cell repair and growth, decrease stress, and more.
- 3 **Temperance:** Prioritizing work/life balance and avoiding addictive behaviors are examples of practicing self-control in various facets of life to minimize mood fluctuations and promote calmness.
- 4 **Limiting Use of Electronic Devices:** Limiting the use of electronic devices and time on social media decreases the temptation for comparison and stirs up feelings of inadequacy. Establishing such boundaries also allows more time to foster in-person relationships and healthier.





## Emotional

- 5 **Journaling:** Writing down our thoughts and feelings enables us to analyze them more clearly, thereby decreasing mental distress. Furthermore, it helps us identify triggers as well as negative self-talk, thought patterns, and behavior patterns.
- 6 **Stress Reduction:** Strategy examples include deep breathing, listening to music, and exercise, to name a few. Take the time to do something that brings you joy and elevates your mood.
- 7 **Setting Boundaries:** This practice sets healthy expectations in relationships and protects your physical and emotional needs while empowering your self-respect.
- 8 **Practicing Gratitude:** The “feel-good” hormone, dopamine, is released during acts of giving and thankfulness, which makes us feel happy and less stressed. This practice also promotes positive thinking patterns that minimize brooding over negativity. Try naming at least three things you are grateful for every day, and make it a goal to identify different ones daily.
- 9 **Practicing Forgiveness:** This action releases the control that someone or something has over you that has offended you. This then allows you to acknowledge the offense and how those emotions affect your behavior, with the goal of moving past that hurt.

## Nutritional

- 10 **Fasting/Intermittent Fasting (Time-Restricted Eating):** The practice of alternating periods of eating and not eating, or in the case of fasting, not eating at all or abstaining from certain foods. Fasting may improve mood, decrease anxiety, enhance cognitive function (memory and concentration), and increase the brain's resistance to stress.
- 11 **Nutrition Optimization:** Low sugar, low processed food, plant-based diets, and food combining are examples of healthier food choices that promote mood stabilization and decrease brain fog. For example, sugar has been shown to be as potentially addictive as certain hard illicit drugs and promotes inflammation that can lead to depression, either directly or indirectly.
- 12 **Meal Spacing:** A practice that refers to the time between meals and eating at regular intervals. Adequate spacing of four to five hours between meals allows for improved digestion and optimal gut health while helping to regulate hormones and manage mood swings.





## Detoxing

The cumulative effects of toxins to which we are exposed on a daily basis—from our food supply, air, water, cleaning products, as well as personal care products—and their detrimental effects on our overall and mental health are often overlooked. This is why routine detoxing practices are important.

- 13 **Minimizing EMF (Electromagnetic Frequency) Exposure:** EMF exposure can cause neurobehavioral effects, including fatigue, depression, anxiety, digestive disturbances, and impaired concentration.
- 14 **Sauna\*:** Promotes the release of endorphins, decreases tension, reduces cortisol production (the stress hormone), and inflammation in the body, as well as promotes the release of toxins via sweating.
- 15 **Oil Pulling:** An ancient practice believed to help remove toxins from the body and improve oral health.
- 16 **Dry Brushing [also, Lymphatic (Drainage) Massage]:** Dry brushing is another ancient practice that facilitates the body's removal of toxins and enhances the body's lymphatic system to remove waste. Lymphatic massage is a similar practice but usually involves the assistance of a trained therapist to perform this practice on an individual for a longer period of time compared to dry brushing.



## Spiritual

**17 Biblical Meditation:** Saying a Bible text aloud can be calming, especially when pausing to ponder its meaning and personal application. Engaging in this practice can lower anxiety levels and improve mood and cognitive functioning.

**18 Prayer:** Prayer can provide comfort, confidence, and encourage optimism to decrease symptoms of depression.

**19 Trust in God or a Divine Power:** Trust in God or a divine power provides support and comfort in believing in a loving, forgiving, and benevolent God.



## Social

**20 Social Interaction:** People who are socially isolated and/or have poor quality social relationships have a higher risk of depression. Having a “village” helps to provide reassuring support, encouragement, and minimize feelings of loneliness.

**21 Volunteering:** Volunteering increases social interaction, takes the focus off of self and one’s problems, increases positive feelings (by releasing dopamine), enhances self-esteem, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and self-empowerment.



## Other

- 22 Sunlight or Light Lamp Therapy\***: Sunlight or light lamp therapy increases serotonin levels and provides vitamin D (vitamin D deficiency can cause mental fog and confusion). Sunlight also helps to regulate the body's internal clock (circadian rhythm), which promotes better sleep quality. Reduced sunlight (particularly in the fall and winter months) can lead to sadness and depression, a condition known as SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder).
- 23 Spending Time in Nature**: Hiking, planting a garden, and forest bathing are some examples of outdoor nature activities. Such activities and access to green spaces help decrease anger, lower stress, and decrease symptoms of depression.
- 24 Earthing/Grounding**: A practice of connecting your body to the earth's electrons, which can be done by walking barefoot outdoors or using indoor grounding systems. Benefits include improving feelings of well-being, a calm and improved mood, stress reduction, reduced anxiety, and increased levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which promotes happiness and contentment.
- 25 Singing**: Singing lowers cortisol (the stress hormone) and enhances endorphins (the feel-good hormones dopamine and oxytocin) to relieve stress, enhance energy, improve mood, increase mindfulness, and foster greater social connections when done with others. (For more information, check out the Sing Up Foundation website at <https://www.singupfoundation.org/singing-health>).
- 26 Attending a Lifestyle/Wellness Center/Retreat\*\***: Visiting a lifestyle center can help jump-start your health journey by focusing on self-care, detoxification, and nutrition, providing education and practical daily health practices in a supportive social setting. While there is a cost involved, consider this particular strategy as a long-term investment in accelerating your health.

\*low cost involved; \*\*cost involved

## Next Steps

List three strategies that you plan to implement in the next 30 days.

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For each strategy listed above, briefly indicate your implementation game plan.

**Action step(s) for strategy #1:**

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**Action step(s) for strategy #2:**

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**Action step(s) for strategy #3:**

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