Online courses for anxiety and depression

Boosting Motivation Guide
About Low Motivation

Low motivation can affect everyone now and then, but when it persists it is a sign and symptom of depression. We predict that at various stages throughout this program, your motivation will fluctuate. So, if it does get low, it will be very important for you to notice it and do something about it.

Staying motivated throughout this program will be key to your success. If you stay motivated, you will practice the skills you learn, and you will be more likely to recover and stay well over the long-term. On the other hand, low motivation may present an obstacle for you to reach your treatment goals. This resource will teach you about motivation, and challenge the myths that many people hold about motivation.

Motivation Myth #1: Motivation is a fixed state (it always stays the same).

Motivation is not a fixed state – it goes up and down. Expect it to fluctuate throughout this program. When you face difficult tasks or experience setbacks your motivation may dip. When you progress and experience successes, your motivation may improve. Some days it will be high, and some days it will be low. Some mornings it may be low, some mornings it may be higher. It is normal and expected to experience both increases and decreases in motivation levels throughout this program. Some days it will be easy to complete the exercises, some days it will be more difficult. See if you can use your mindful awareness skills to notice and be curious about your motivation levels. Remember not to judge yourself whenever your motivation is lacking – even by reading this resource sheet you are taking active steps towards getting better!

Motivation Myth #2: There is nothing that can be done to improve my motivation levels.

There are active strategies that you can use to boost your motivation. In fact, there are a whole bunch of research studies showing that that show motivational interviewing can be helpful to increase motivation. There are also other useful strategies that can help too which will be explained in more detail below.

Motivation Myth #3: I need to wait until I feel motivated to try that activity I’ve been meaning to try.

Waiting until you feel motivated is a recipe for disaster. This is because you may never feel motivated enough to try that thing you’ve been putting off, or that activity that is part of the lesson. The best way to become more motivated is to take action. The more you do, the more motivated you will feel. The less you do, the less motivated you will
Motivation Myth #4: Some people just aren’t motivated people.

This is a very common misconception, and misleads the world into thinking that there are motivated people, and there are unmotivated people, but none in between. The truth is that every person has the capacity to become motivated, but they are motivated by different reasons. The challenge for you will be to discover what truly motivates you. Usually the things that motivate you are the things that you truly value.

Motivation Myth #5: If you punish yourself, then it will help motivate you.

Some people think that if they set very high standards for themselves, and criticise themselves if they haven’t reached their goals, then this will help them stay motivated. They also think that if they praise themselves then they may become ‘soft,’ ‘lazy,’ or ‘complacent’ and this will prevent them from achieving the goals they have set out. The reality is that it works the opposite way. When you berate or punish yourself, or criticise yourself for your failures, how do you feel? How motivated are you? How capable do you think you are? When most people stop and take notice of what happens when they punish themselves, they realise that it actually reduces their motivation, it doesn’t increase it. Try adopting an alternative, more positive attitude and approach towards yourself.

Helpful Strategies to Boost Motivation

Come back to this list if you’re having difficulty getting motivated and tick off the things that you can try to help boost your motivation levels:

1. Recognise when your motivation is low, and then you can do something about it.

Recognise when your motivation is low and the different parts of the low motivation cycle:

- **Recognise the thoughts:** ‘I don’t want to do it,’ ‘I couldn’t be bothered’ ‘It’s not worth the time/effort/energy,’ ‘I’ll do it later when I feel more motivated,’ ‘I don’t have the strength to do this right now.’
- **Recognise the feelings:** feeling unmotivated, tired, bored, depressed, unfulfilled and drained.
- **Recognise the physical sensations:** tiredness, slowing down, heaviness in your body or mind.
- **Recognise the behaviours:** having difficulty completing tasks, avoiding things, making excuses, having difficulty getting out of bed, slowing down.
• **See if you can mindfully acknowledge what barriers come up** (i.e., thoughts and feelings above) **and proceed towards your goals anyway, allowing those experiences to simply be a part of your present moment.**

2. **Explore your choices by weighing up the pros and cons**

When we are having mixed feelings about making changes in our lives, whether we’re considering making a change to our thoughts, our actions or our feelings, it can be helpful to explore the pros and cons of change. Identifying the pros (advantages) and the cons (disadvantages) helps to identify the things that may be holding us back from change, and also helps identify exactly why we want to change. Writing down why you think making this change will be a positive step for you can be very motivating. You can also come back to it if you face challenges in future, and use the worksheet to remind yourself of the reasons why you’ve chosen to make this change. Consider the following questions, and write your answers down on a sheet of paper:

- What are the possible advantages of changing?
- What are the possible disadvantages of changing?
- What are the possible advantages of staying the same?
- What are the possible disadvantages of staying the same?

These 4 simple questions will help you clarify:

- The specific reasons why you want to take action.
- The things that may hold you back from making this change.
- What you are afraid of or uncertain about if you did try to change.
- Whether this action or change is consistent with what you value, and consistent with your goals and what you want to achieve.
- Whether you are ready to take that next step.
Example:

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<tr>
<th>What are the possible advantages of changing?</th>
<th>What are some possible disadvantages of changing?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• I will get my life back</td>
<td>• It will be very hard.</td>
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<td>• I will get along better with my family, and stop snapping so much.</td>
<td>• It will take persistence, and I’m not sure I have the energy for it.</td>
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<td>• I will be able to do the things I’ve stopped doing – spending time with friends, going out, going to places on my own, and doing my hobbies.</td>
<td>• It will take a lot of time and patience.</td>
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<td>• I won’t feel so isolated and lonely.</td>
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<td>• I’ll never get the opportunity to feel better.</td>
<td>• It feels safe, and known.</td>
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<td>• I’ll keep feeling like this.</td>
<td>• People will still treat me the same - it’s familiar, comfortable, and I can predict what will happen.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• I might even get worse – these patterns made me become more and more depressed and anxious. If they keep going this way, it could get worse and worse until I have no friends.</td>
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Take a few moments now to reflect on YOUR reasons for change.

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3. Recognise the external factors that are reducing your motivation, and take positive steps to deal with them if you can.

For example, if physical illness, feeling tired, or being around ‘unmotivated’ people are sucking your motivation, take positive steps to make changes to these factors. For example, you could take positive steps to change your sleep routine so that you have more time to sleep, go to the doctor to resolve illnesses, take time out if you need to, and delegate tasks to other people.
4. Identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts that are getting in your way

Once you identify the negative thoughts that are getting in the way, see if you can mindfully let them go, or make sure you replace them with helpful, encouraging, motivating statements that you say to yourself to help you become more motivated. Think of what you would say to a friend to encourage them to work towards an important goal. Don’t berate yourself or punish yourself, because it doesn’t improve motivation, it just reduces motivation.

5. Set realistic and manageable goals, and make a detailed plan to work towards your goals

Make sure your goals are consistent with what you value and what’s important to you – make them meaningful. Break down your goals into smaller steps: small goals are more motivating than large goals that feel unachievable. **Make a specific, detailed, realistic plan to work towards your goal** - consider who is needed, what needs to happen, what other things you need to put the plan into action? How you will do it, when you will do it, check for obstacles and plan how you will deal with them. **Talk yourself through the steps as you implement your plan** – this helps you focus and take one step at a time.

6. Imagine yourself taking action and having success implementing your plan

Studies show that if you imagine doing something, it actually makes us more likely that you will follow that plan through. Even if you can’t get motivated to take action right now, imagine yourself going through each of the steps, imagine how it would feel, what sensations you would notice, what would happen, how you would do it, and imagine yourself succeeding in your plan and reaching your goal.

7. Don’t wait until you feel motivated

Just do what you planned, slowly but surely, one step at a time. Doing things helps boost our motivation. The more we do, the more motivated we feel. The less we do, the less motivated we feel.

8. Tell others about your plans, and involve them in your plans

Even if you’re worried about failing or not following through with your commitment, it is important you share your plans and goals with other people. Making commitments to other people to do things can help motivate you to take action. Making plans with other people can help so you’re not so reliant on your own feelings of motivation to get going. Sometimes having external support and encouragement can help get you going, and then your internal
motivation will follow.

9. **Use your strengths and think of past times you’ve been successful**

Think about past times you have managed to do something when your motivation was low. How did you do it? What things made it more likely? How did you overcome the obstacles? How did you motivate yourself? How can you apply this to the current problem?

10. **Acknowledge success, even small successes**

At each step, reward yourself by acknowledging it. There are many ways you can reward yourself—through praise and helpful self-talk, through telling others, through writing tasks down and tick off at the end of the day, through to acknowledging and writing down things you have achieved.

**Summary**

This resource provides key information about how to boost your motivation. Taking active steps to notice low motivation, and then improve your motivation is an essential part of improving anxiety and depression more generally.

We hope you have found some useful ideas in this resource and we encourage you to try them to see which ones work best for you.

Good luck!

The Team from This Way Up.

[www.thiswayup.org.au](http://www.thiswayup.org.au)