

# Ten Week Guide to Healing and Thriving

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Trumpeter Swan, Bath Nature Preserve, 2017 [www.Lightworkswonders.com](http://www.Lightworkswonders.com)

# Welcome

Welcome to this week-by-week guide for preventing and healing depression so you may thrive. It was created to accompany my book, *Healing Depression without Medications: A Psychiatrist's Guide to Balancing Mind, Body, and Spirit*, for those who prefer a bit more structure, extra motivation or guidance on your journey. We are all wired differently in terms of what motivates us. We need to honor our unique needs.

For those of you who are best motivated by step-by-step guidelines to break something big and unwieldy into smaller, doable pieces, this guide is for you. Change is only possible if we choose to take action and do things differently. If we continue to think, act, and react in the same ways that led us down the path of depression, we will continue to dwell there. If, however, we take time to listen to our bodies and hearts, and discover what is out of balance, we can recalibrate, rebalance, reconnect, and heal. We all periodically fall off our intended paths. Judgment and blame only add to our suffering. Acknowledge you are human and perfectly imperfect, and simply start over right here, right now. With each breath, each minute, and each day we have endless opportunities to start anew.

## Week 1: Call of the Imagination

To begin this journey, you need only to commit to setting aside twenty minutes, three times this week to establish your inner resources. Schedule three twenty-minute sessions on your calendar and commit to taking this time for yourself. All you need to accompany you on this journey is a journal, pen, and open mind.

**Day 1:** Journal your initial impressions of what you have read, how you experience your depression in your thoughts, body, and emotions, now or in the past.

**Day 2:** Establish a peaceful place in your imagination where you can escape to calm and balance your body and mind.

**Day 3:** Add nurturing, protective, and wise resources to your internal arsenal.

**Day 4:** Set your intention. What do you most desire or hope to gain from reading this book and trying the Wellness Rx's?

For the rest of the week, focus on your intention daily, feeling it in your body as if it has already manifested. Set aside 5 minutes in the morning and at night to practice connecting with the inner resources you've established. The more you practice, the more easily you will be able to access these powers. Notice when your mind is feeding the Wolf of Fear, and offer nurturance instead to the Wolf of Hope and Possibilities. Record your experiences and observations.

## Week 2: Breath as Anchor

This week, we will focus on learning to use the breath for grounding, stability, and to balance the nervous system. This is perhaps the most important skill you will learn as the breath is always available, and has the power to shift and settle emotional reactivity anywhere, anytime.

**Day 1:** Notice your unique breath and breathing patterns.

**Day 2:** Learn the foundational belly breath.

**Day 3:** Practice alternate nostril breathing.

Set an intention this week to check in and notice your breath at several points in the day. You may even want to set an alarm to remind yourself to check in, if only for a few minutes, or even seconds, if you are busy. Every day, commit to setting aside at least 5, ideally 10 minutes, once or twice a day to focus on the breath. You could breathe into the belly or combine that with the alternate nostril breathing. If you are struggling to breathe into the belly, listen to the diaphragmatic breathing audio at [www.jodieskillicorn.com](http://www.jodieskillicorn.com) to teach your body another way of relating to the breath.

## Week 3: Mind as Storyteller

This week, you will begin to observe the mind's ability to create stories that feel like facts, especially if repeated often enough. You will begin to see these are just fictional narratives that can keep us trapped inside cages that don't exist.

**Day 1:** Practice mindful eating and notice the meanderings of the restlessly wandering mind.

**Day 2:** Notice the recurring stories of your mind. Keep a list of the favorite storylines your brain returns to over and over and over again.

**Day 3:** Instead of paying attention to the breath, try focusing on the soundscape around you.

**Day 4:** Bring mindfulness into your daily life. Pick at least one routine activity to approach mindfully. It could be taking a shower, washing your hands, or standing in a check-out line. Allow the activity you pick to bring you back into the present by becoming aware of your breath and thoughts.

Continue to practice awareness of the breath for at least 10 minutes once or twice a day. As you do this, become aware of the pull of your thoughts. The goal this week is to notice the thoughts in your mind as just thoughts, not facts. Acknowledge: "There is thinking," "There is judging," "There is planning." Then return to the breath, again, and again, and again. Your goal is to drive your bus to your intended destination, despite the stories in the mind luring you elsewhere or keeping you stopped by the side of the road arguing with the teenagers in the back of the bus who want to go a different direction. Be sure to write down your experiences and observations.

## Week 4: Body as Navigator

This week, you will learn to tune in and listen to the wisdom of the body. The breath and body both offer us a means to return to the only moment that matters—this one right here, right now.

**Day 1:** Notice the body's sensations with the body scan. Use the changing sensations of the body as another tool to step out of the wandering mind and ground yourself in the the body and the present moment, free of regrets and replays about the past, and fearful ruminations about the future.

**Day 2:** Notice the body's changing sensations as a means to access your emotional states before they overwhelm you. By leaning in and listening, rather than resisting or avoiding, you can soften the intensity of emotional reactivity.

**Day 3:** Practice the Breathing Space. This quick practice ties all you have learned so far into a simple exercise that can be done in minutes or even seconds.

Use the Breathing Space a few times a day this week to quickly check in with your breath, thoughts, body, and emotions for emotional house-cleaning. It is easier to clear space as emotions, tension, and stress arise, rather than waiting for the stress of the day to accumulate and boil over. Notice your breath, areas of tightness in the body, negative thoughts, posture, and facial expressions. Continue to practice breathing daily. This may be combined with the body scan or done separately. Just keep doing it. Don't listen to the brain's stories about how this can't help. If the mind persists in discouraging you, notice the thoughts as just thoughts and choose to stick to your commitment and intentions. Continue to write down your experiences and observations.

## Week 5: Moving the Body

This week, set the intention to move no matter how defiantly or creatively your brain suggests otherwise. Our bodies are designed to move. Sedentary lives double the risk for depression. Movement improves energy, cognition, and mood.

**Day 1:** Today, you are going to shake. Yes, shake. Set a timer for 8 minutes, turn on some music if you like, and start shaking.

**Day 2:** Set a clear intention to move. Write it down in your journal. Imagine with all your senses how that will look and feel. Sense your body being energized and stronger. Imagine all the lethargy and heaviness escaping the body as you move and shake your limbs. See yourself accomplishing all the things you have put off because you did not have the energy or motivation. Envision it all as if it has already manifested. Let your body sense that new reality. What are you going to do today? Tomorrow? Write down your plan, envision it, and put it in motion.

**Days 3-7:** Just move. Find time to move throughout the day. Notice any resistant stories creeping in that may prevent you from starting because you “don’t have enough time”, or the right equipment, or there’s just too much else going on this week. Get up and move for a few minutes every hour or two. Walk a hallway. Climb the stairs. Jog in place. Walk around the block. Set aside 10 minutes to walk, dance, run, swim, do yoga or jump rope. Do anything. Just move.

For the rest of week, set aside time to move daily and continue to practice breathing. Notice your body before and after you move. Notice any thoughts that may arise that keep you stuck to your chair. Remember, they are thoughts, not facts. If you miss a day, no judgment, but, like the breath, simply begin again anew right now. Record your observations in your journal.

## Week 6: Nourishing the Body

Keep it simple as you become more aware of your food choices, and move towards offering your body more nourishing, mood-enhancing foods this week. Notice judgmental thoughts and counter them with forgiveness and kindness.

**Day 1:** Look through your refrigerator and cabinets and pay attention to food labels. Assess how much of your food falls under the category of “real” versus processed. Awareness is the first step to change.

**Day 2:** Use the Breathing Space exercise when craving sugary, salty, or fatty processed foods to assess what you may really need in the moment. Perhaps it is not food you need, but a moment to pause, breathe, and reset.

This week, focus on reducing your intake of processed and sugary foods and adding more veggies, greens, fruits, beans, and nuts to your life. With every meal, pause before eating and offer gratitude for your food. Set the intention to take the first bite mindfully, fully noticing its color, smell, texture, and flavor.

Consider adding supplementation with fish oil, magnesium, curcumin, and theanine. If you decide to start any of these, I highly recommend starting one at a time to notice your body’s response. Although these are safe supplements, our bodies are all biochemically unique, so we must pay attention and listen to the body’s messages.

## Week 7: Restoring the Body with Sleep

Our bodies require sleep for restoration and healing. This week, observe your sleep habits and tweak areas that may be helpful for you. Consider starting a dream journal to access the wisdom of your sleeping mind.

If sleep has been a chronic issue for you, consider signing up for online cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBTi). Check out the resource guide for further information. You may also consider adding a calming supplement, herb, or tea. Practice belly breathing or left nostril breathing before bed as it will help your mind quiet and your body relax. Better yet, do the breathing while you prop your legs up the wall. Another wonderful technique to help with the frustration about not being able to fall asleep is EFT, as discussed in Chapter 14. Continue to move daily as exercise also helps with sleep. If the body doesn't move, it has a difficult time settling down at night.

## Week 8: Connect with Nature and Remove Toxins

The goals this week are to get outside and connect with the natural world around you, and begin eliminating some of the toxins in your environment.

**Day 1:** Take a couple of minutes to kick off your shoes and stand barefoot in pesticide-free grass, soaking up the energy of the earth. If you only have 10 minutes, mindfully take a walk around the block, regardless of weather. At least once this week, set the intention to explore a nearby park, so you can breathe in the healing phytoncides of the trees. Walk, hike, bike, dance, rollerblade, hula hoop, or just sit, but get outside. Notice the sights, smells, and sounds around you. Feel the air on your skin and ground beneath your feet.

**Day 2:** Eliminating all the toxins used on your body and in your home may feel overwhelming—and expensive. No need to add to your stress here. The easiest way to make changes is to bring more awareness to any new products you put in your shopping bag. As your first step today, try downloading the EWG's Healthy Living app to your phone so the next time you are in a store, you can quickly look up approved products and avoid bringing yet more toxins into your home and life. Transition slowly. Keep it simple. Each change offers accumulative benefits.

**Day 3:** Review any medications you may be on with your physician to see if all of them are necessary.

Continue to practice breathing and moving your body daily—maybe move these practices outside this week, depending on the weather. Pause and notice your breath, thoughts, body, and emotions throughout the day. Find creative ways to engage with the natural world around you.

## Week 9: Connecting with the Heart, Energy, and Soul

This week's intent is to tune in and listen with the heart, offering yourself kindness and compassion.

**Day 1:** Practice heart-centered meditation, shifting your focus from the breath and body to feelings of appreciation and gratitude.

**Day 2:** Start a gratitude journal and seek small moments of appreciation.

**Day 3:** Take an inventory of your day. What changes can you make to your daily routine to add more moments of replenishment and fewer moments of depletion?

**Day 4:** Consider joining a class, group, or club, or signing up to do some volunteer work. How about a trip to a museum with a friend? Find some creative, replenishing ways to broaden your circle and connect with others.

Set aside time each day for heart-centered meditation and to write in your gratitude journal before bed. Each day, look for all that is good in the day rather than myopically focusing on what is wrong.

## Week 10: Connecting the Pieces

Congratulate yourself for getting this far! Really. Place your hand over your heart and thank yourself for your efforts. We spend so much time beating ourselves up for what we do wrong or fail to do, and forget to give ourselves credit for our progress and accomplishments. Take time to reflect this week on what you have learned and the progress you have made on this journey. Write down your observations.

**Day 1:** Tune in with the heart to clarify your intentions moving forward. Your intentions provide a roadmap to guide you to your destination. This will keep you on track when the Storytelling Mind persuades you to go in another direction or keep you trapped at home in fear. Imagine yourself already manifesting your intended reality. Envision it with all your senses. Write it down. Tune in with it daily as you do your morning meditation. Create a vision board with those things you most want to manifest in your life. Commit.

## Final Thoughts

You are the driver of your own bus. It is up to you to be clear about your travel plans. There will inevitably be overcast days and days with storm clouds and lightning. You may need to pull over to the side of the road for rest or to wait for the worst of the storm to pass. Even then, can you reframe the situation? You can bemoan the storm or look for rainbows. You can whine about what you should be doing, or could be doing, or what everyone else is doing who is not stuck in today's storm, or you can catch up on some good comedy movies, read a book, meditate, put on an exercise video, and make a bowl of hearty soup. Maybe you feel sick and just need a day of rest and relaxation. That is fine. Honor your body's needs, but do not be fooled by the mind's stories. Regardless of your circumstances, you get to choose how you frame your situation. What wolf are you going to feed today? I hope that after reading this book and doing these exercises, that the Wolf of Hope and Possibility has been fed a bountiful meal, and you continue to offer her compassion and nurturance.

*May you be happy, healthy, and well in every way!*

*May you feed the Wolf of Hope.*

