

# ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT) FOR DEPRESSION

## WHAT IS ACT?

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (or “ACT”) is an effective, short-term “talk therapy” for depression.

People with depression have negative thoughts and painful feelings that contribute to depression. To try and cope, they often avoid or try to push these thoughts and feelings away. However, this constant struggle with one’s negative thoughts and feelings make the depression worse. ACT teaches effective skills that focus on changing your relationship with your thoughts and feelings so that they no longer hold the power they once did. ACT helps people with depression learn to be more accepting of themselves and to engage in meaningful life activities. One of the main goals of ACT is to help people move forward by supporting actions that are linked to important values they hold for what matters most in their life.

## WHAT WILL I DO IN ACT?

First, you will work as a team with your ACT therapist to set goals for changes in your life that will guide treatment. During treatment, you’ll learn effective strategies to help you achieve these goals. These strategies include:

- Learning how to change your relationship with your negative thoughts and emotions so they no longer have the same impact on your life
- Learning skills for staying focused on the present moment, without judging yourself or your experiences, rather than live in the past
- Overcoming avoidance of your emotions
- Clarifying and choosing what values you want to live by in your life
- Making commitments to live your life in line with your values

You and your therapist will come up with practice exercises that you can do outside of session to apply the new skills you learn to your everyday life.

## HOW LONG DOES ACT TAKE?

Treatment usually lasts between 12 and 16 sessions. However, each person is different, and you and your therapist will work together to decide how many visits are right for you.

## HOW OFTEN WOULD I MEET WITH MY ACT THERAPIST?

ACT sessions are usually provided weekly or every other week.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF ACT?

You may feel some discomfort when talking about difficult issues that you are currently facing in your life. ACT is “present-focused,” meaning that you will not spend much time talking about or focusing on your past.

## HOW EFFECTIVE IS ACT?

Although ACT is a newer talk therapy, a number of research studies have shown ACT to be effective in treating depression, including with Veterans. Because ACT teaches new skills for managing unpleasant thoughts and emotions related to depression and for focusing on living life according to one’s values, the benefits usually last well after treatment ends.