

How to survive unemployment

These steps can help you maintain a healthy outlook

You've been unemployed for months, perhaps longer. Your bank account is shrinking and so is your self-esteem. It's getting harder to get out of bed in the morning.

Losing a job ranks almost as high as the death of a spouse and divorce as one of life's greatest stressors on a standardized scale. It doubles your risk of becoming clinically depressed.

It's painful to feel rejected. When you've lost a job, you may feel frustrated, guilty, hopeless, and angry. You miss the routine and colleagues of the workplace and the feeling of belonging. It can be a humbling, even humiliating experience.

"We tend to identify with our jobs," says Lynn Hagan, PsyD, LCSW. "It's so strongly a part of us, that if we lose it, we feel personally inadequate. If it was an economic layoff, it's difficult to accept, but if we were fired, we find it much more difficult to explain it to family and friends."

It's important to watch for signs of depression, says Hagan. If you're sleeping or eating too much or too little, if you're finding it difficult to take care of yourself or if you're becoming so paralyzed that you can take no action on your job hunt, it may be time to get help. Along with depression, anxiety can result from the stress of unemployment. Physical symptoms such as upset stomach, tightness in the chest, headaches or shortness of breath can indicate panic attacks. Talk to your doctor.

How can I keep a healthy outlook while I'm job hunting?

Becoming proactive is key, says Hagan. These four steps, she says, can help.

1. Avoid isolating yourself. Let others be supportive. Seek out networks of others in similar situations. (Google "unemployment support groups" and the name of your city.)
2. Stay active. Don't put off getting started on your job search. Stick to a routine, much like the one you had when you were working. Get up, have breakfast and get dressed about the same time every morning. Volunteering can be a good way to keep your skills sharp, but don't let it interfere with your job hunt.
3. Manage your resources carefully. Involve the whole family in budgeting decisions. Contact your creditors to arrange payment plans and avoid falling behind. The more in control you are of your financial situation, the less it will contribute to depression. Manage your time as well as your money.
4. Take care of yourself. Maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating right and getting enough sleep and exercise. Avoid alcohol and caffeine which can increase anxiety and depression. Make time for pleasurable activities and involve family members in planning them.



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