Worried about the future? Preventing depression during your teens and twenties

Adolescence and young adulthood present many opportunities — for meeting new people, visiting new places and finding a direction in life. These years can also be a time of stress. If you are feeling overwhelmed rather than excited by these challenges, read on.

What you should know

• Depression is an illness characterized by persistent sadness and a loss of interest in activities that you normally enjoy, accompanied by an inability to carry out daily activities, for at least two weeks.
• In addition, people with depression normally have several of the following: a loss of energy; a change in appetite; sleeping more or less; anxiety; reduced concentration; indecisiveness; restlessness; feelings of worthlessness, guilt, or hopelessness; and thoughts of self-harm or suicide.
• Much can be done to prevent and treat depression.

What you can do if you are feeling down, or think you may be depressed

• Talk to someone you trust about your feelings.
• Seek professional help. Your local health-care worker or doctor is a good place to start.
• Stay connected. Keep in contact with family and friends.
• Exercise regularly, even if it's just a short walk.
• Stick to regular eating and sleeping habits.
• Avoid or restrict alcohol intake and refrain from using illicit drugs; they can worsen depression.
• Continue doing things you have always enjoyed, even when you don't feel like it.
• Be aware of persistent negative thoughts and self-criticism and try to replace them with positive thoughts. Congratulate yourself on your achievements.

REMEMBER:

There is a lot that you can do to keep mentally strong. If you feel that you may be heading for depression, talk to someone you trust or seek professional help.