

## Support Group: Coping with Depression and Emotional Overload

February 17, 2026

### Announcements

- BHC online event schedule
  - 1st Tues: Support Group
  - 2nd Wed: Coffee with a Clinician
  - 3rd Tues: Support Group
- Events Calendar: <https://batemanhornecenter.org/events/>
- Clinical Care Guide: <https://batemanhornecenter.org/clinical-care-guide/>
- Support BHC's mission: <https://givebutter.com/BuildingAccessNow>

*The following resources and anecdotes were shared by attendees and do not necessarily reflect BHC guidance or endorsement.*

Timothy Weymann, LCSW, introduced the topic of depression, explaining that it is one of the most common comorbid conditions associated with chronic illness, meaning it frequently occurs alongside it.

### Guiding Questions

1. What's a difficult symptom that chronic illness depression brings?
2. What are you learning that helps you prevent, reduce, or manage depression?
3. What helps you most when you are facing a dark emotional moment?

### Timothy's Shared Wisdom

- Your mind can be a dangerous neighborhood; don't go there alone. When you notice yourself spiraling, make it a priority to step outside your thoughts and reach for connection. Lean on supportive people and structures that can help ground you and guide you through dark moments.

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- We can challenge mental health stigma by noticing and questioning any judgments that frame symptoms as personal flaws rather than legitimate health conditions. Shame can prevent people from seeking help or taking responsibility for their care, so it's important to actively replace self-criticism with compassion and view mental health concerns as valid and deserving support.
- It can be really important for us to be intentional about where we put our focus, our resources, and our energy.
- There is always hope, but it may not look the way you first imagined. Sometimes hope means improvement, and sometimes it means learning how to build a meaningful, valuable life even with illness. Because these conditions exist on a spectrum, outcomes vary. Rather than holding onto the idea that the only life worth living is one without disease, consider expanding your definition of hope to include connection, purpose, and meaning under any circumstances. Be intentional about defining what hope means to you.

### **Participant Verbal Comments**

- Participant shared that during very dark moments, lighting a candle is what helps most. The simple act of lighting it reminds them to turn their eyes and mind toward the light. Focusing on the flame feels comforting and uplifting, helping prevent them from spiraling into darker thoughts. They described this ritual as their saving grace.
- Participant shared feeling a recent increase in depression tied to the loss of being able to explore and create in the ways they used to. As an artist, they miss going out to inspiring places, but the physical toll it would take on their body makes it feel impossible. To cope, they crochet and immerse themselves in shows like House Hunters International, imagining they're traveling to places through the screen. While it's not a full replacement for being out in the world and feeling the sun on their face, it helps lift their mood and gives them a sense of escape when they need it.
- Participant shared that after living with illness for about 16 years, one of the hardest parts has been feeling isolated and disconnected in a meaningful way. They reflected that in their darkest moments, what helps most is being of service

to others. Having begun 12-step work before getting sick, they feel grateful they are able to support others, even while physically limited. They see it as a silver lining that they can still make a difference, even from bed, and that service has become their anchor.

- Participant shared that they have a long history of major depressive disorder and are currently mostly bed bound. They reflected that maintaining a positive mindset and doing what they can within their limits has helped them avoid falling back into a major depressive episode. They urged others to seek medical assistance at that point and to use every available support and tool before it reaches the darkest stage.
- Participant reflected that one of the hardest parts of illness has been losing their former sense of purpose. Before getting sick, they were used to being the one who helped others, and now needing help themselves feels uncomfortable and unfamiliar. Practices like mindfulness and even simple rituals like lighting a candle feel lifesaving. Until they can redefine their sense of purpose, they are working on making peace with where they are, especially during low moments.
- Participant shared feeling deeply disconnected from the world and unsure how to remain connected to humanity while confined mostly to their bedroom. They described the pain of not feeling understood by those closest to them, who know they are sick but don't truly grasp the reality of it. Because ME/CFS can they find themselves withdrawing when those closest don't understand or ridicule them.
- Participant shared that they previously experienced a gradual and severe depressive episode after losing their former identity and abilities, compounded by major life stressors. What helped most was intentionally placing meaningful, life-giving activities in front of themselves, including finding a way to be of service from home, committing to regular connection with a friend, and attending spaces like this group. They emphasized how isolating deep depression can feel.
- Participant described being in a recovery period after a long stretch of illness that significantly changed their life. Although their symptoms have improved, they notice their mood swings between gratitude and happiness on good days and grief over what was lost. Lately, they've been working to maintain a consistent

sleep routine, get up on time even on days off, work a low-pressure part-time job, and intentionally place small commitments in front of themselves, like calling a friend. They shared that gently pushing themselves to stay engaged helps stabilize their mood and keeps them moving forward.

- Participant shared living with ongoing depression and significant health limitations, describing depression as the most difficult symptom to manage. They emphasized the importance of breathwork, especially coherent breathing, along with sound, singing, and mindfulness practices to help regulate their nervous system. Being of service to others, even in small ways, feels grounding and meaningful. They also practice “titrating” emotions by releasing them a little at a time to avoid worsening symptoms, and rely on journaling, music, and carefully chosen media to support emotional balance. They described maintaining a “love to do” and “easy to do” list to focus on what remains accessible.
- Participant shared that attending a 12-step meeting has been deeply helpful. They briefly described the first three steps, which focus on acknowledging powerlessness, believing in support beyond oneself, and turning things over to a higher power as personally understood. They emphasized that being in a space where they feel they belong and are not alone has made a meaningful difference in coping with chronic illness.
- Participant shared that when feeling especially alone, they intentionally go to places where someone will greet them and ask, “Can I help you?” such as a sit-down restaurant, a store with attentive staff, or even a gym. The simple experience of being acknowledged, listened to, and helped, even in a small or transactional way, provides meaningful human contact and often shifts their mood. They offered this as a practical tool that might help others who are struggling with isolation.
- Participant shared that their depression intensified significantly after developing ME/CFS, and that learning about the spoon theory became a turning point. Framing energy as limited “spoons” helped them regulate their activity and question whether they want to spend precious energy on negative thoughts or things outside their control. Although it took years to practice, they now try to

protect their spoons carefully. They also described occasionally “planning a crash” for meaningful events and intentionally using most or all of their energy to show up for something important, knowing they will need days to recover. For them, pacing and consciously choosing how to spend limited energy has been a powerful and ongoing coping strategy.

- Participant shared that music has been deeply meaningful throughout their life and identity. As their ME/CFS progressed, they were no longer able to engage with music in the same way and stepped away from it for a time. Recently, they’ve begun reconnecting with music differently by discovering new artists and collecting vinyls. This has brought joy and a sense of stimulation without relying on screens, which can be difficult for them. Reconnecting with music in new ways has helped them feel more connected to themselves again.
- Participant shared grief over the dramatic change from a once highly active life to now living with Long COVID and PEM. They expressed feeling discouraged despite understanding pacing and spoon theory. They described feeling torn between wanting to stay hopeful and not wanting to cling to false hope and acknowledged how deeply depressing that uncertainty can feel.
- Participant shared that each day feels different, and although their baseline has changed, they still experience variation and moments of feeling relatively well. They expressed having hope, grounded in the fact that no moment lasts forever, and even when hope fades, it returns. They reflected that while their ability to make a difference looks very different than it once did, they can still connect and contribute in meaningful ways.
- Participant shared that hope, for them, comes from focusing on making tomorrow just a little better than today. Even with daily ups and downs, they try to look at the bigger picture. They also emphasized the importance of mindset and mindfulness as ongoing tools.

### **Participant Comments from the Chat**

- “I cannot tell the difference between needing to stay in bed because of ME/CFS and staying in bed because I am depressed.”
- “Watch a baking or a travel show to be transported.”

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- “Yes! I travel via the television as well!!”
- “What helps when facing a dark emotional moment, frankly sometimes it's escapism. Going online and watching music shows or Star Trek or cat videos. I know it's escapism, which is not a solution, but I can't help it!”
- “Love watching art shows...great British sewing bee. Portrait artist of the year and landscape artist of the year are awesome.”
- “For me it is the chronic better off dead thoughts but been using ACT lately and I figured out since I fight medical neglect and fight to stay alive. My acceptance thought is that it isn't that I want to die but when having those thoughts, it is this life meaning fighting for basics being bedridden I don't necessarily want to live. And my commitment is to be the advocate I am and to know it isn't me. Sometimes other egos get involved, especially in health care. I can't always control that”
- “I can read uncomplicated mysteries and like the romantic ones, so I get a happy ending.”
- “I've been watching the comedy *The Good Place*. Didn't catch it when it first aired, so now streaming it. The show is silly, absurd, yet very positive, and hopeful. Quick 22-25 min episodes to chuckle and feel good with.”
- “Learning to recognize my emotions and appropriately express them seems to keep depression at bay.”
- “1. What's a difficult symptom that chronic illness depression brings? I already had depression and CPTSD before getting LC, MECFS and AFib, so I'm not sure. It isn't about an extra symptom for me. It's about the inability to let off steam or let myself cry without bringing on a PEM and OI crash. IMO the depression IS the difficult symptom because I can't let myself get a proper emotional release without making things worse.”
- “There's a wonderful intensive outpatient mental health care clinic called CHARLIE HEALTH if you aren't well enough to go to inpatient mental health care. They have great virtual support groups.”
- “I tend to withdraw when depressed. Recognizing this destructive process and having things I can do - written down - like calling someone, or trying to find something I'm grateful, really keeps me from going too deep.”

- “Using prayer and meditation techniques when faced with challenges often helps me from falling into depression.”
- “Chronic illness changes how you see yourself AND how we react to events. Emotions are a roller coaster daily.”
- “Writing down my thoughts clears my mind and puts them in perspective.”
- “Gill Deacon’s book, *A Love Affair with the Unknown*, is a wonderful easy read with a lot of wisdom. I found it very helpful.”
- “A big part of my depression is not being able to work anymore. I’ve found Chat GPT gives useful and specific advice on how I can incorporate meaning that my job gave me in small ways.”
- “Question 1. The isolation, and the fatigue, have a spouse that does not understand but not many understand if they are not affected, but she offers no support, and truthfully does not believe me, I am wasting money on treatments, doctors, etc., as what I do sleep rest, I measure sleep as Hannah just said, pacing, and I’ve had to go outside of my family to found support, all the above mostly the lack of support and believing is where I go dark.”
- “For helping get through the day I write out a schedule each morning when I wake up and I have 3 goals that I know I can accomplish so I can cross them out on a list. Some example items are diaphragmatic breathing (can find free guided on YouTube), wiping my body down with a bath body wipe, or texting friends I haven’t heard from in a while to learn what’s new in their life.”
- “You are not alone. You still have value. Our job is figuring out what we can do now and letting go of what we used to be able to do. This disease is not who we are.”
- “Pacing is the most helpful --- I think not just for patients, but now I think for life in general - all in the world, it’s a smart practice.”
- “Coherent breathing is a wonderful tool! It was recommended to me by a virtual Long Covid physiotherapy clinic (Cornerstone LC program) to keep my nervous system in a parasympathetic state. This is the video I use:”
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i5apnLrzaT4>.
- “I think we are all grieving loss, so sadness and despair are to be expected. But we can still try to find joy as well.”

- “I keep depression at bay by seeking joy in little things and finding little things i can do for people I love so I feel a part of the world still. Meditation, creative outlets, putting on a comforting distracting movie, or putting on MASH keeps me grounded. I too am a sober alcoholic, and the program still empowers me with the tools I learned to deal with the suffering of this disease. I feel strongly that I have PTSD from this experience. I keep my world small and surround myself with creature comforts. The less dr appts the better. Every time I am retraumatized, it takes me a little bit to reground myself. I feel hopeful and grateful for every day I am alive. I am a survivor. That is my superpower.”
- “I have found depression in direction related to PEM (brain inflammation). Pacing can really help reduce periods of depression. Also, environmental exposures (perfumes, cleaners, air fresheners) can also cause a delayed depression like PEM.”
- “One of the things that really helped me prevent /manage depression was changing my mindset as far as my expectations. I lowered my expectations of others understanding my situation or being supportive. It was discouraging and depressing, instead I save my energy and not try to explain it to certain people anymore or be discouraged by them and focused on the people I do have that love and support me.”
- “‘Is this what I want to do with my limited spoons?’ - a great gauge for all of us before attempting any activity.”
- “The lack of good sleep and fatigue in me/CFS is a physiological set up for depression, not to mention chronic pain. In a flare up I get less deep sleep and then I know to watch out for depression exacerbation. If I can get decent sleep, that will surely help. It's a matter of how to accomplish that. My doctors are helping me with sleep issues.”
- “My approach may be too simplistic... but when ‘that voice’ starts trying to take me down, I remind myself, often out loud, ‘This is not you speaking, Lisa. This is Long Covid speaking. Rest and pacing are what you need to silence that voice.’ Daily anti-depressant and working with a therapist also help keep me in balance. I also have come to learn that grief is different than depression. Grieving is

necessary for all the losses we experience and tears help. Stuffing the grief only makes things harder.”

- “And if you decide to do a big thing one day, it might be helpful pretend you have PEM in advance--radical rest 3 days (or whatever) before the event.”
- “I’ve had to be so assertive about my spoon usage recently with a friend going through difficulty turning up and asking me to babysit her children overnight, neighbors asking us to feed their cat again whilst they go on holiday - a request we’ve done for years. Now the answer is firmly ‘No’. That has also been empowering!”
- “I find if I’m going to use spoons, it also helps to rest beforehand and store them for when I plan to use them.”
- “The memories I created when planning a crash have sustained me during the times I couldn’t do it. It gives me hope that I can do it again in the future and create more memories.”
- “Regarding the questions. Things that have been helpful:”
  - Connecting with loved ones daily, even if a short text
  - Listening to audiobooks
  - Crocheting
  - Reminding myself that I’m in a moment of suffering and it will pass
  - Self-compassion
  - Smoke cleansing
  - Energy clearing exercises / somatic movements
  - Grounding or uplifting scents (when I’m not as sensitive)
- “I found that having a therapist who also has chronic illness herself has helped in my therapy. She even just presented at a seminar for EDS about the comorbidity of MECFS with EDS. It really makes me feel seen to have a therapist who ‘gets it.’”
- “I’ve been using a free online Omnichord! It’s been a great accessible instrument when I can tolerate screens.”

## Tiny Triumphs

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- TT: Yesterday I went outdoors on my mobility scooter! First time outdoors in months.
- TT: I started a medication that is helping me sleep!
- TT: I went to lunch with friends yesterday so happy!
- TT: found a new hobby I can do laying down! Spinning wool into yarn!
- TT: Not so tiny- I had to move all my furniture from the walls for someone else's problem. I live in a high-rise and this happens occasionally. I made it but have been sleeping a lot.
- TT: Started painting and giving it to friends
- TT: recently started physical therapy. It's a not-so-tiny triumph!

### Resources

- Timothy's Website:
  - <https://www.timothyweymann.com/>
- Depression support group called LiveWell Foundation. Free; no registration is needed.
  - [LiveWellfoundation.org](http://LiveWellfoundation.org)
- 12 Step program for those with chronic illness:
  - <https://chronicpainanonymous.org/meetings/video-chat-meetings/>
  - <https://emotionsanonymous.org/>

### Crisis Resources

- Dial 988
  - [What Happens When You Call 988? \(Article\)](#)
- Dial 911
- [Crisis Text Line](#)
- [Crisis resource page \(BHC\)](#)

### Potential Financial Assistance Resources

- [Healthwell Foundation](#)
- [Patient Access Network Foundation](#)
- [Needy Meds](#)
- [My Good Days](#)

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## Chronic Illness Therapist Directory

- <https://www.thechronicillnesstherapist.com/directory>

## Support Groups (alphabetical order)

### Lived-Experience Support Groups

- Action for ME (online youth support based in UK)
  - <https://www.actionforme.org.uk/18-and-under/support-for-under-18/join-our-young-peoples-community/>
- BHC Support Group 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday at 1 pm MST
  - <https://batemanhornecenter.org/events/>
- Black COVID-19 Survivors
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/bcsalliance/>
- Brain and Spine Group for Zebras
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/brainandspinegroupforzebras>
- CFS/ME Friends
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/CFSMEFRIENDS>
- Health Stories Collaborative Creative Meetups
  - <https://www.healthstorycollaborative.org/creativemeetups>
- International ME Support Chat
  - 11am-1pm EST/ 5 -7pm GMT / 3-5am Melbourne time & 9-11pm EST/ 3-5am GMT/ 2-4pm Melbourne time
  - <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84362703704?pwd=bfKmegaCLNhS6KwOUve7fkcsQjs7sB.1>
- Invisible Youth Support Group
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/invisiblyouthgroup>
- Long Hauler Advocacy Project
  - <https://www.longhauler-advocacy.org/support-us>
- Long COVID Families
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/4345929175466216>
- Massachusetts ME and FM Association Small Group Chats

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- <https://www.massmecfs.org/>
- #MEAction Living w/ME Support Group
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/211058135999671>
- #MEAction Long COVID Group
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/205703087068863>
- #MEAction Seniors Connect
  - [https://www.facebook.com/groups/391269901334695/?ref=pages\\_profile\\_groups\\_tab&source\\_id=1408335399448862](https://www.facebook.com/groups/391269901334695/?ref=pages_profile_groups_tab&source_id=1408335399448862)
- #MEAction Pillow Crafters (Group Crafting Sessions)
  - <https://www.meaction.net/pillow-crafters/>
- #MEAction Additional Groups
  - <https://www.meaction.net/groups/>
- ME/CFS Social Group
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1202428297198122>
- ME/CFS phone support group
  - Occurs on Saturday nights at 8pm, EST.
  - Call: 609-746-1155. Punch in: 915110#. Group is open to all.
- State Specific Long Hauler Facebook Groups
  - <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1vMNCrONg1oTy5QPzajNUJffu0gk4eBR4o585NosVgsk/edit#gid=0>
- Surviving with ME
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/695317212152964>
- The Mighty Group Directory
  - <https://themighty.com/groupdirectory/>
- Utah COVID-19 Long Haulers
  - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2619858348232191>
- The Yarrow Collective's Alternative to Suicide group is a weekly Zoom meeting. It's a free resource for folks who are struggling that is nonclinical peer support. They also have chronic illness and disability support groups.
  - <https://www.yarrowcollective.org/>

## Caregiver Support

- [Caregiver Wisdom](#) is an online venture to support chronic illness caregivers. [Current free offerings](#) include: a [monthly support group](#), a [free online community](#) that's off of social media, and a [blog](#) with helpful posts.
- A support group for partner caregivers (please note all caregivers are welcome) takes place the first Sunday of each month at **12 p.m. PT / 3 p.m. ET**. Focuses on monthly topics and has small breakout rooms for closer community connection. To be added to the email list, contact Kim at [kim.mecfs@gmail.com](mailto:kim.mecfs@gmail.com).
- #MEAction's support group for all family caregivers takes place the third Saturday of each month at 10:30 p.m. PT / 1:30 p.m. ET. To be added to the email list, contact Denise at [caregiver@meaction.net](mailto:caregiver@meaction.net).
- If you are on Facebook, [#MEAction has a Facebook group for caregivers](#)
- If you are on Discord, Nia has started a [channel for ME/Long COVID caregivers](#).