

# Depression Recovery Roadmap

*A step-by-step, evidence-based path you and your doctor can walk together.*

Companion to the Depression series · Episodes 31 & 32 · drkumardiscovery.com

This roadmap is meant to reduce the cognitive burden of depression, restore structure, and give you direction when planning feels difficult. Work through it in order. Each step builds the foundation for the next, and every layer makes the others more effective.

## IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ FIRST

**This is education, not medical advice.** It is designed to help you and your physician work together to navigate your health, not to replace the judgment of a clinician who knows your history.

Do not start, stop, or change any medication or supplement on your own. Bring this document to your appointment and use it as a starting point for that conversation. **If you are unable to care for yourself, experiencing psychosis, or having thoughts of harming yourself or others, seek emergency help immediately.** In the U.S., call or text 988.

## STEP 0 Assessment & Safety Net

*Establish a baseline and make sure you are not attempting recovery in isolation.*

- Complete the **PHQ-9 questionnaire** to establish a baseline score
- Record your PHQ-9 score: \_\_\_\_\_
- Identify one support person who knows you are actively working on recovery
- Schedule an appointment with your doctor to discuss thyroid function, Vitamin D, CBC, B12, and folate testing

## STEP 1 Lifestyle Foundations · Weeks 1–4

*These interventions flatten the terrain. They make every other treatment more effective.*

- Set a fixed daily wake-up time and follow it Monday to Sunday
- Get outdoor light in your eyes for 10–30 minutes shortly after waking
- Create a consistent bedtime routine and a cool, dark sleep environment
- Move your body daily for at least 10–20 minutes
- Eat a whole-food, minimally processed diet
- Include fermented foods or a probiotic daily
- Ensure at least one social connection every day
- Optimize Vitamin D with your doctor

- Take magnesium glycinate (200–300 mg) nightly
- Take an EPA-dominant omega-3 supplement
- Replete zinc or folate if deficient

## STEP 2 Psychotherapy & Biohacks

*Retrain thought patterns, reward circuitry, and stress physiology.*

- Begin Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or Behavioral Activation
- Use cold exposure ( $\geq 30$  seconds, once or twice daily)
- Use sauna therapy for 10–20 minutes, 1–4 times per week if available
- Practice breathwork once or twice daily
- Practice mindfulness or body-scan meditation

## STEP 3 Evidence-Based Supplements

*Supplements may add biological support when lifestyle and therapy are not enough.*

### TIER 1

- St. John's Wort — 900 mg standardized extract daily, split into 2–3 doses (discuss with your doctor; be aware of drug interactions)
- Saffron — 30 mg standardized extract daily
- SAMe — 800–1,600 mg daily, divided into 2 doses
- Curcumin — 500–1,000 mg extract daily (enhanced-bioavailability formulations)
- Creatine monohydrate — 3–5 g in a single dose daily

### TIER 2

- L-theanine — 200–250 mg daily, 3 hours before bed
- Rhodiola rosea — 340 mg standardized extract daily

#### How to supplement safely:

- Only use third-party-tested supplements with standardized dosing
- Add only one supplement at a time
- Track your PHQ-9 response every 4–6 weeks

## STEP 4 Medications

*Medications are appropriate when symptoms remain moderate to severe.*

- Discuss SSRIs or SNRIs with your doctor
- Allow 4–6 weeks for an adequate trial

- Adjust dose or switch medications if needed
- Consider augmentation strategies under supervision

### STEP 5 **Advanced Interventions**

*Reserved for persistent or severe depression, guided by a specialist.*

- Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)
- Ketamine-assisted therapy
- Psychedelic-assisted therapy where legally available
- Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) in severe or life-threatening cases
- Neurofeedback

## Resources

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PHQ-9 Questionnaire — [drkumardiscovery.com/calculators/phq9](https://drkumardiscovery.com/calculators/phq9)

Breathwork (YouTube) — [youtube.com/@BreatheWithSandy](https://youtube.com/@BreatheWithSandy)

CBT app — [thinkwithclarity.com](https://thinkwithclarity.com)

Behavioral Activation guide — [therapistaid.com](https://therapistaid.com)

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To your health and recovery,

*Dr. Ravi Kumar, MD*