

# Psychotherapy's benefits for depression

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Treatments for depression that don't involve antidepressant drugs but rather focus on different forms of talking therapy (referred to as psychotherapeutic interventions) are all beneficial, with no one form of therapy being better than the others, according to a study by international researchers published in this week's *PLOS Medicine*.

These findings are important as they suggest that patients with depression should discuss different forms of non-drug therapy with their doctors and explore which type of psychotherapy best suits them.

The researchers, led by Jürgen Barth from the University of Bern in Switzerland, reached these conclusions by reviewing 198 published studies involving over 15,000 patients receiving one of seven types of psychotherapeutic intervention: Interpersonal psychotherapy, behavioural activation, cognitive behavioural therapy, problem solving therapy, psychodynamic therapy, social skills training and supportive counselling.\* The authors compared each of the therapies with each other and with a control—patients on a waiting list or continuing usual case—and combined the results.

The authors found that all seven therapies were better at reducing [symptoms of depression](#) than [waiting list](#) and usual care and that there were no significant differences between the different types of therapy. They also found that the therapies worked equally well for different [patient groups](#) with depression, such as for younger and older patients and for mothers who had depression after having given birth. Furthermore, the authors found no substantial differences when

comparing individual with [group therapy](#) or with face-to-face therapy compared with internet-based interactions between therapist and patient.

The authors say: "We found evidence that most of the seven psychotherapeutic interventions under investigation have comparable effects on [depressive symptoms](#) and achieve moderate to large effects vis-à-vis waitlist."

They continue: "All seven psychotherapeutic interventions achieved a small to moderate effect compared to usual care."

The authors add: "Overall, we found that different psychotherapeutic interventions for depression have comparable, moderate-to-large effects."

\*"Interpersonal psychotherapy" is short and highly structured, using a manual to focus on interpersonal issues in depression.

"Behavioral activation" raises the awareness of pleasant activities and seeks to increase positive interactions between the patient and his or her environment.

"[Cognitive behavioural therapy](#)" focuses on a patient's current negative beliefs, evaluates how they affect current and future behaviour, and attempts to restructure the beliefs and change the outlook. "Problem solving therapy" aims to define a patient's problems, propose multiple solutions for each problem, and then select, implement, and evaluate the best solution.

"Psychodynamic therapy" focuses on past unresolved conflicts and relationships and the impact they have on a patient's current situation.

In "social skills therapy," patients are taught skills that help to build and

maintain healthy relationships based on honesty and respect.

"Supportive counselling" is a more general therapy that aims to get patients to talk about their experiences and emotions and to offer empathy without suggesting solutions or teaching new skills.

**More information:** Barth J, Munder T, Gerger H, Nüesch E, Trelle S, et al. (2013) Comparative Efficacy of Seven Psychotherapeutic Interventions for Patients with Depression: A Network Meta-Analysis. PLoS Med 10(5): e1001454. [doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1001454](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001454)

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