

## **Beat the Blues Before They Beat You: How to Overcome Depression.**

Robert L. Leahy

Carlsbad, California: Hay House ([www.hayhouse.com](http://www.hayhouse.com))

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In the tradition of such classic CBT self-help books as *Feeling Good* and *Mind Over Mood*, and following his own successful, popular books on CBT for anxiety (*The Worry Cure* and *Anxiety Free*), Bob Leahy has now published *Beat the Blues Before They Beat You: How to Overcome Depression*. From the outset, the author skillfully educates his reading audience, in language that is accessible and clear, about the nature of clinical depression, its damaging impact on individuals and on society, and how it can be treated successfully. Leahy aptly describes the role that people's thinking habits and styles play in their psychological malady, effectively teaching readers the cognitive-behavioral model of depression. Leahy draws on some of the most important empirical findings in the field as he explains the role of such cognitive problems as overgeneralized memory and ruminations, among others.

Each chapter presents, explains, and illustrates a different facet of cognitive-behavioral dysfunction pertinent to depression, such as hopelessness, low motivation, pathological indecision and self-doubt, interpersonal problems and loneliness, and others, including an all-important chapter devoted to the topic of relapse prevention. The chapters are very well-organized, including self-monitoring tools, instructive illustrations, and bullet points that efficiently summarize the chapters at their respective conclusions. This makes the volume not only an informative read, but also a quick and convenient reference.

As a rule, Leahy's writing is clear, fluid, and possesses a warm, appropriately humorous tone, such as when he encourages readers to be "indecisive about your doubts" while still moving forward. Those who know the author can hear his friendly, engaging voice in the writing. Similarly, readers who are otherwise unfamiliar with the author will readily feel a sense of connection, as Leahy is very compassionate and respectful toward those who are depressed. He is also open enough to share occasional, personal vignettes of his own, thus inviting the readers to feel at home. CBT therapists can feel very comfortable and confident in recommending *Beat the Blues* to their clients, knowing that the clients will learn methods that are congruent with best practices in CBT, that the tone of the book conveys the essence of good-natured, collaborative empiricism, and that the volume itself can serve as an important source and/or facilitator of the clients' CBT homework assignments.

Leahy also deftly and empathically deals with issues that clinicians often see in their depressed clients who have co-morbid Axis-II disorders. Without labeling these problems as personality disorders per se, Leahy describes the sorts of self-defeating habits and interpersonal difficulties that such clients typically experience (for example, being chronically, excessively negative in the company of others who are trying to be helpful), and offers solid, reasonable suggestions for trying new, more adaptive modes of functioning. Such an approach makes *Beat the Blues* applicable to a wider range of readers, while simultaneously averting anything that could sound stigmatizing.

Yet another strength of *Beat the Blues* is the appendix that summarizes biological treatments that are currently available to treat depression, such as pharmacotherapy, light therapy (for Seasonal Affective Disorder), electro-convulsive therapy (ECT), vagus nerve stimulation (VNS),

and transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). By presenting these alternative or supplemental treatments to CBT, Leahy makes the statement that his intention is to help depressed individuals by any and all professionally reputable means. In doing so, Leahy shows that while he is an expert in CBT (and thus he is able to write comprehensive self-help guides in this modality), he is more generally a proponent of *empirically-supported treatments*. Readers will greatly benefit from knowing that they have these treatment options, in addition to all of the useful skills they will learn from the CBT methods presented in detail in *Beat the Blues*. Likewise, while Leahy clearly illustrates how individuals can empower themselves by learning to apply the principles described in the book, he also makes it clear that seeking a CBT therapist is sometimes the most prudent course of action. Toward that end, Leahy presents an additional appendix that helps readers to find a CBT therapist via the major professional websites in the field today.

Leahy's approach – caring yet authoritative, familiar and personal yet respectful and professional, educational and accessible without sounding formulaic on the one hand or esoteric on the other hand – serves as a natural invitation to take part in CBT, increasing the chances that even those readers who at first are skeptical or apprehensive will give the myriad self-help interventions a try, and/or seek appropriate professional help. For those who take the opportunity to read *Beat the Blues* in its entirety, the reward is not only a thorough understanding of the methods of CBT, but a sense of its heart and humanity, as Leahy's message is unfailingly caring and often philosophical, including an ending that is positively poetic.

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