TIME TO THRIVE THERAPY

When Everything Feels Like an Effort

A gentle practice for low energy and low motivation



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A companion guide to the audio practice

A gentle way to begin

When energy is low, ordinary things can feel heavy. Use these steps alongside the audio or on their own to choose one manageable way to care for yourself today.

Move at your own pace. Rest, food, water, and asking for support are all welcome choices.

1 Arrive as you are

Let your eyes stay open or soften your gaze. Notice where the chair or floor supports you. Let your breathing be comfortable. There is no particular feeling you need to create before you begin.

2 Notice your capacity

Ask, “What feels available to me right now?” You may have room for a brief activity, need a much smaller version, or need rest. Start with today’s capacity rather than the energy you think you should have.

3 Choose what matters today

Ask what you want an action to offer: a little enjoyment, a sense of capability, or a connection with something you personally value. Capability might mean caring for yourself in a way that fits today’s energy. One action can serve more than one purpose.

4 Make the first step smaller

Find the beginning, not the whole task. “Get in touch” might become opening one person’s contact. “Have something to eat” might become taking a snack from the cupboard. Make the starting point small enough for the energy you have.

5 Give it a gentle place in your day

Choose when, where, what could help, and where you will stop. Before you try it, briefly predict how possible it feels and what it might offer. Afterward, compare that expectation with what you actually noticed. Helpful, neutral, or too much are all useful information. You do not have to feel better for the practice to count.

You are allowed to stop at the small step you planned.

A few small places to start

Use these as possibilities, not assignments. Pick one that fits your needs, access, and energy. Change it freely.

Care for a basic need

Take a drink of water. Eat something simple. Get comfortable for a period of rest. Ask someone to bring what you need closer.

A smaller beginning: reach for the glass, choose a snack, or put a pillow where you want to rest.

Make a little connection

Send one text to someone you trust. You could ask for company, practical help, or a check-in without explaining everything.

Words you might use: “I’m low on energy today. Could you check in with me later?” Or, “Could you help me figure out dinner?”

Leave room for enjoyment

Listen to one favorite song, sit near a window, or spend a brief moment with something you care about. Choose what feels welcome rather than what you think should cheer you up.

A smaller beginning: find the song or move a comfortable chair. A change in mood is not required.

Ease one practical pressure

Wash one dish, place an appointment number in your phone, or gather one item you will need later. Keep the limit you chose, even if more remains.

A smaller beginning: put the dish beside the sink or find the phone number. You can stop there.

If even the smaller version feels like too much, pause. Consider rest, a different action, or help from someone else. You do not have to earn rest by completing a task.

One example from start to finish

This is a hypothetical example, not a promise of how you will feel.

You miss a friend, but an entire evening together feels impossible. Rather than choosing between a long visit and no contact, you look for a smaller way to connect.

Name the purpose

“This friendship matters to me. I want a little connection, in a way I can manage.” The purpose is personally valued connection. Enjoyment would be welcome, but it is not a requirement.

Notice the prediction

“I think I am too tired for a whole evening. Even a short call may feel tiring. Sending a brief invitation seems more possible. Hearing their voice might feel good, but I’m not sure.” You can be uncertain without trying to talk yourself into optimism.

Choose the small action

After lunch today, while sitting on the sofa, you open your friend’s contact and send: “I miss you. Would you have ten minutes for a call tomorrow? My energy is low, so I’d like to keep it short.” Opening the contact is the smallest starting step.

Make the plan kind to your energy

If your friend agrees, you plan to call at 6 tomorrow from the sofa, with water nearby. You ask them to help keep it to ten minutes. If your energy drops, the easier version is exchanging a brief text instead. You can also pause and rest.

Review what actually happened

In this example, you send the text and have the short call the next day. Afterward, you notice: “I’m still tired and my mood hasn’t completely changed, but I felt connected. Ten minutes was manageable because we agreed on an ending.” You might keep that limit next time.

Your result may be different. If the call feels draining or offers little, you can choose a shorter contact, another kind of support, or rest. The review helps you learn what fits.

My one small practice plan

A few words are enough. Choose one action and a stopping point.

My action and what I want it to offer

Enjoyment / A sense of capability / Something I personally value

My smallest starting step

When and where I will try it

What or who could help and where I will stop

An easier version if my energy drops

Before I try it I predict

How possible does it feel? What might it offer, if anything?

Afterward I noticed

Helpful / Neutral / Too much. How did it compare? What would I keep or change?

When more support would help

If fatigue is new, persistent, worsening, or affecting daily life, check in with your healthcare provider. Low energy can have physical as well as emotional causes. If low mood or seasonal changes are making life harder, a mental health professional can help you explore what you need.

This self-care practice is informed by behavioral activation. It is not a course of treatment for depression or seasonal affective disorder. Follow any care or pacing plan you already have.

Request a consultation | 925-322-1681

Practice sources

McKay, Davis, and Fanning. Helping Your Clients with Depression Get Mobilized. New Harbinger, 2021, pp. 2-3 and 7-8. Korb. The Upward Spiral Workbook. New Harbinger, 2019, chapter 2. Exercises here use original wording.

NIMH Seasonal Affective Disorder
NHS Tackling your to-do list
NHS Tiredness and fatigue