

Evidence Base for Behavioral Activation (BA)

Selected References

1. Cuijpers, P., van Straten, A., & Warmerdam, L. (2007). Behavioral activation treatments of depression: A meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 27(3), 318–326. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2006.11.001>

This article conducted a meta-analysis of randomized effectiveness studies of BA treatments. Authors concluded that BA is an attractive treatment for depression, not only because it is relatively uncomplicated, time-efficient and does not require complex skills from patient or therapist, but also because this meta-analysis found clear indications that it is effective.

2. Dimidjian, S., Barrera, M., Martell, C., Muñoz, R. F., & Lewinsohn, P. M. (2011). The origins and current status of behavioral activation treatments for depression. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 7, 1–38. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032210-104535>

This review summarizes the origins of a behavioral model of depression and the BA approach to the treatment and prevention of depression.

3. Dimidjian, S., Hollon, S. D., Dobson, K. S., Schmaling, K. B., Kohlenberg, R. J., Addis, M. E., Gallop, R., McGlinchey, J. B., Markley, D. K., Gollan, J. K., Atkins, D. C., Dunner, D. L., & Jacobson, N. S. (2006). Randomized trial of behavioral activation, cognitive therapy, and antidepressant medication in the acute treatment of adults with major depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 74(4), 658–670. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.74.4.658>

Authors tested the efficacy of BA by comparing it with Cognitive Therapy and antidepressant medication in a randomized placebo-controlled design in adults with major depressive disorder. This study found that among more severely depressed patients, BA was comparable to antidepressant medication, and both significantly outperformed Cognitive Therapy.

4. Fortney, J. C., Bauer, A. M., Cerimele, J. M., Pyne, J. M., Pfeiffer, P., Heagerty, P. J., Hawrilenko, M., Zielinski, M. J., Kaysen, D., Bowen, D. J., Moore, D. L., Ferro, L., Metzger, K., Shushan, S., Hafer, E., Nolan, J. P., Dalack, G. W., & Unützer, J. (2021). Comparison of Teleintegrated Care and Telereferral Care for Treating Complex Psychiatric Disorders in Primary Care: A Pragmatic Randomized Comparative Effectiveness Trial. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 78(11), 1189–1199. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2021.2318>

This pragmatic randomized comparative trial examined the effectiveness of treating patients with Bipolar Disorder and/or PTSD using two approaches: (1) telepsychiatry/telepsychology-enhanced referral, and (2) telepsychiatry Collaborative Care including BA. They found significantly improved outcomes for patients enrolled in either randomized group and recommend clinics implement whichever approach is more sustainable in their context.

5. Jakupcak, M., Wagner, A., Paulson, A., Varra, A., & McFall, M. (2010). Behavioral activation as a

primary care-based treatment for PTSD and depression among returning veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 23(4), 491–495. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jts.20543>

This preliminary study of Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans found that primary care-based BA treatment improved PTSD, depression, and quality of life for patients. Additionally, the study found that patients were highly satisfied with this treatment.

6. May, D., Litvin, B., & Allegrante, J. (2022). Behavioral Activation, Depression, and Promotion of Health Behaviors: A Scoping Review. *Health Education & Behavior*, 10901981221090156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10901981221090157>

Authors surveyed peer-reviewed studies examining the efficacy of BA interventions on individuals with depressive disorders. This review showed BA interventions to be effective at increasing desired health behaviors and reducing depression in participants.

7. Mazzucchelli, T., Kane, R., & Rees, C. (2009). Behavioral Activation Treatments for Depression in Adults: A Meta-analysis and Review. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 16(4), 383–411. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2009.01178.x>

The authors concluded that BA interventions were effective treatments of depression in adults.

8. Soucy Chartier, I., & Provencher, M. D. (2013). Behavioural activation for depression: Efficacy, effectiveness and dissemination. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 145(3), 292–299. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2012.07.023>

This systematic review on low-intensity BA interventions for depression reviewed BA's theoretical foundations and efficacy determining its potential as a low-intensity intervention. Authors concluded that BA could be a viable option as a low-intensity guided self-help treatment for mild to moderate depression.

9. Stein, A. T., Carl, E., Cuijpers, P., Karyotaki, E., & Smits, J. A. J. (2021). Looking beyond depression: A meta-analysis of the effect of behavioral activation on depression, anxiety, and activation. *Psychological Medicine*, 51(9), 1491–1504. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291720000239>

This meta-analysis offers updated evidence that BA is effective in treating depression, and preliminary evidence demonstrating its efficacy in treating anxiety and facilitating activation.

10. Wang, X., & Feng, Z. (2022). A Narrative Review of Empirical Literature of Behavioral Activation Treatment for Depression. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 13. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsy.2022.845138>

This review presents a conceptual overview of BA, and the evidence supporting its efficiency for treatment of depression. Authors concluded that there is evidence of BA's effectiveness for sub-threshold and clinically diagnosed depression, as well as depressed patients with mental or physical comorbidities.