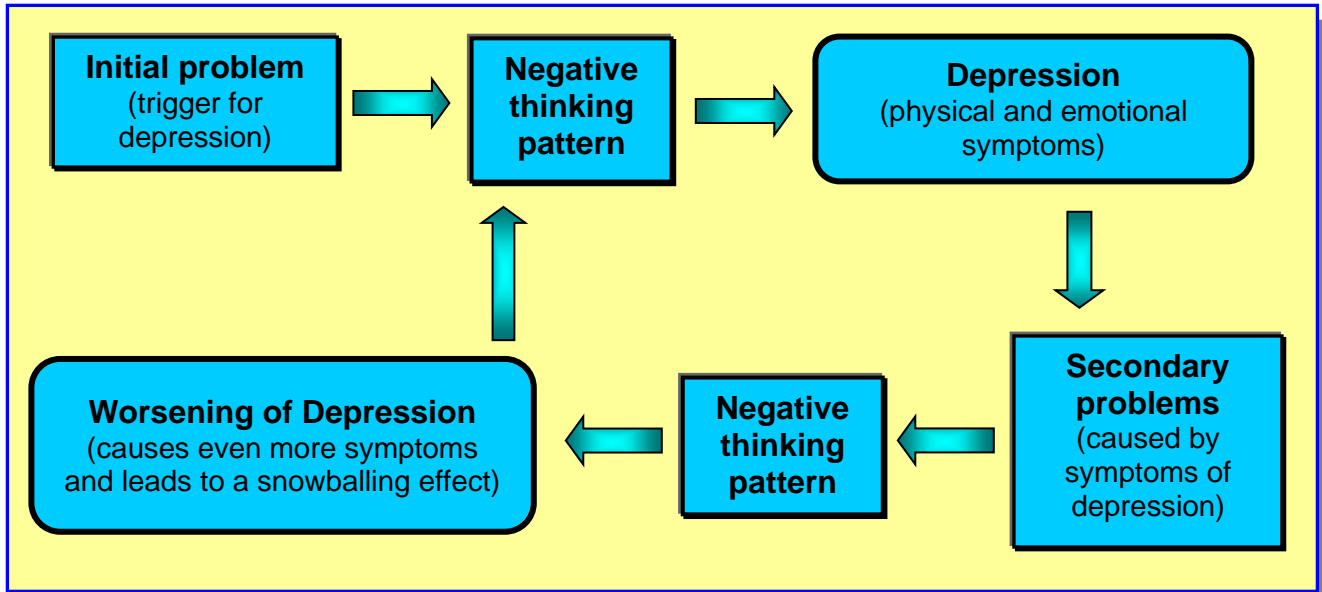


Secondary problems and negative behavioral cycles

When you are depressed, you may find yourself experiencing new problems that are a direct result of the depression. These secondary problems can then help to keep you depressed and form what we call “negative behavioral cycles.” The diagram below illustrates how mild depression can escalate into full-blown depression as a result of these cycles. The general idea is that depression causes a person to experience more and more stressful situations, compounding his or her depression.



The process works like this: After experiencing some trigger, which can be any initial stressor or problem, a person begins thinking about the problem in a way that leads to depression. In turn, this produces symptoms of depression. These symptoms are often emotional (sadness, irritability) and physical (poor concentration, low energy). These symptoms often cause more problems, which can worsen the depression. This is especially true if the secondary problems are also viewed through the lens of negative thinking.

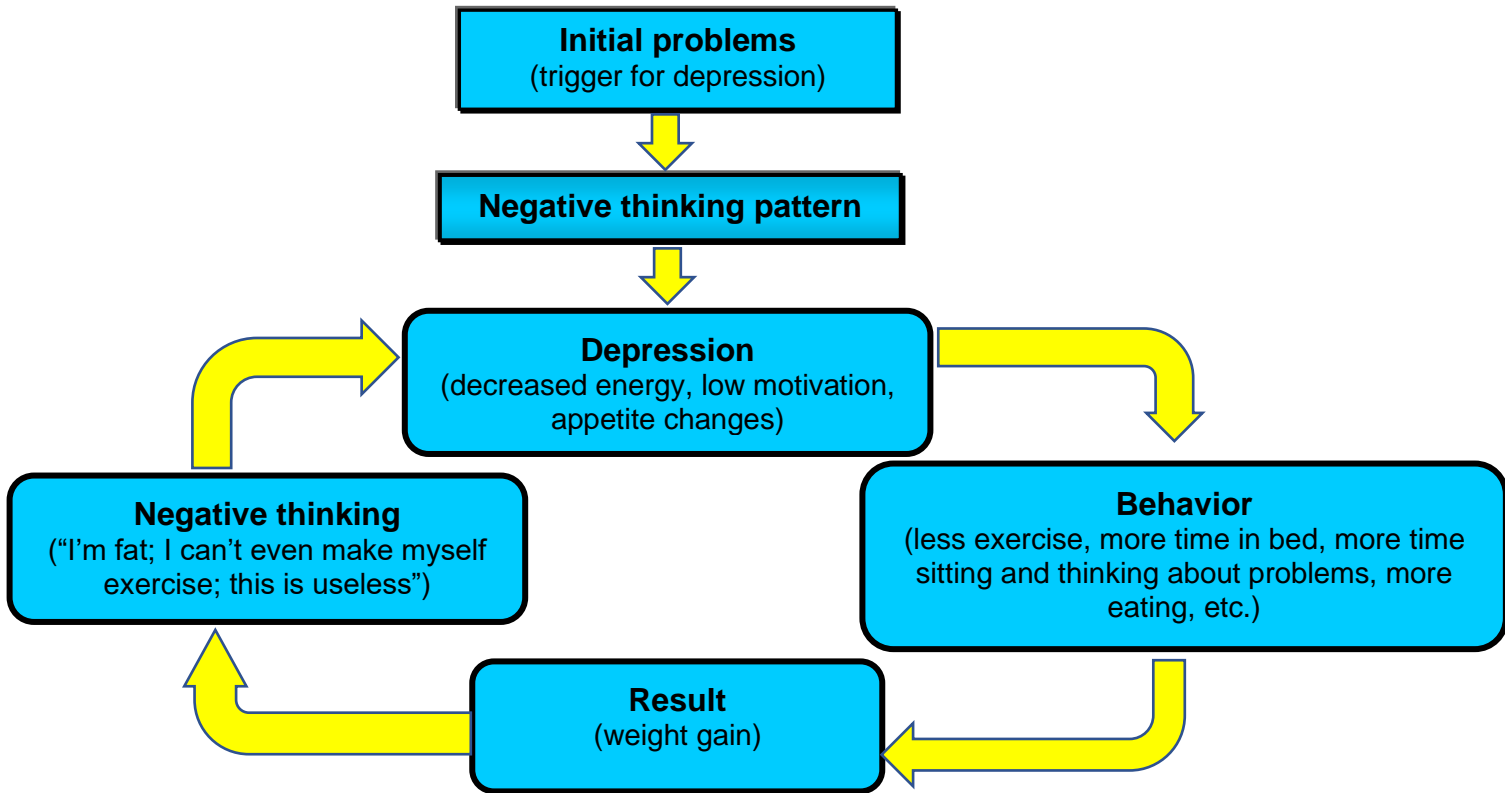
Some examples of secondary problems that can be caused by depression symptoms:

Contributing Depression Symptoms	Secondary Problems
Poor concentration/memory, low energy, irritability	Work problems
Irritability, social withdrawal	Relationship problems
Low energy, low interest levels, appetite changes	Weight gain
Irritability, low motivation	Loneliness
Decreased energy, low motivation	Procrastination

Now we'll look at some of these common behavioral cycles in detail. As you look over the different cycles, try to decide if this is something that is affecting you. You can also look back to consider what may have been happening earlier on, when you were first becoming depressed, that contributed to your depression.

Secondary problems and negative behavioral cycles

Depressive cycle: Weight gain and depression



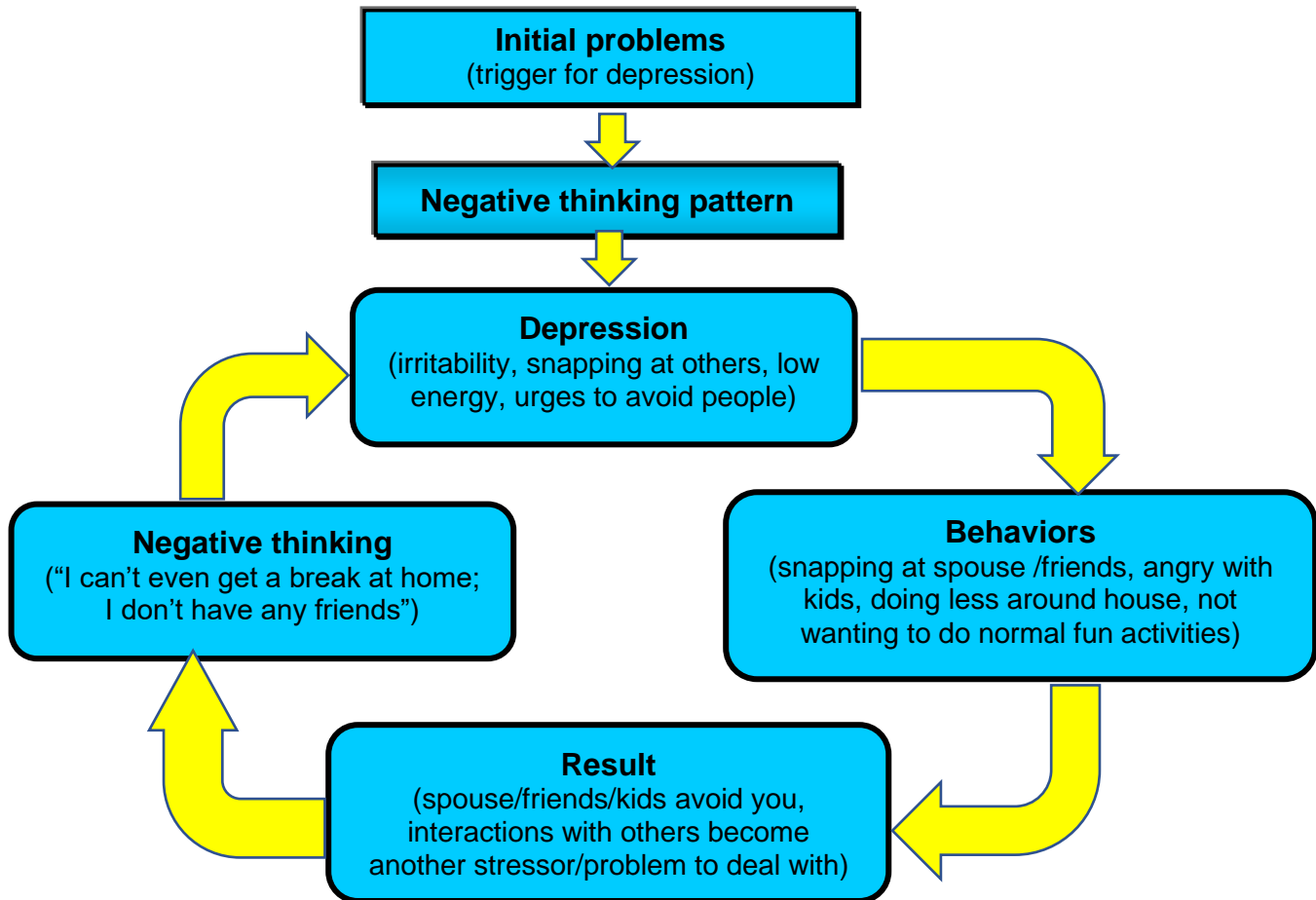
Some common symptoms of depression are feeling tired and having low motivation. Motivation works backwards when we are depressed. When depressed, it is important to be active because you often start feeling motivated after you begin doing something. Waiting to “feel up to it” is a common strategy in depression, but is not effective. Many people fall into the trap of staying in bed and thinking about problems, therefore not engaging in activities. Add in the tendency for depressed people to have appetite changes like overeating, and you can easily develop a secondary problem of weight gain and the negative thinking patterns that often go with it.

How to break this cycle:

- 1) Learn to control the depressive thinking style for both the initial problem, and for the weight gain. Keep a realistic view about weight gain. Remember that it is not permanent.
- 2) Schedule regular activities, including exercise, and minimize time spent alone going over and over your problems.
- 3) Identify overeating and lack of exercise as problems. Use problem-solving skills to set a diet and exercise routine with reasonable and achievable goals.

Secondary problems and negative behavioral cycles

Depressive cycles: Interpersonal/relationship problems



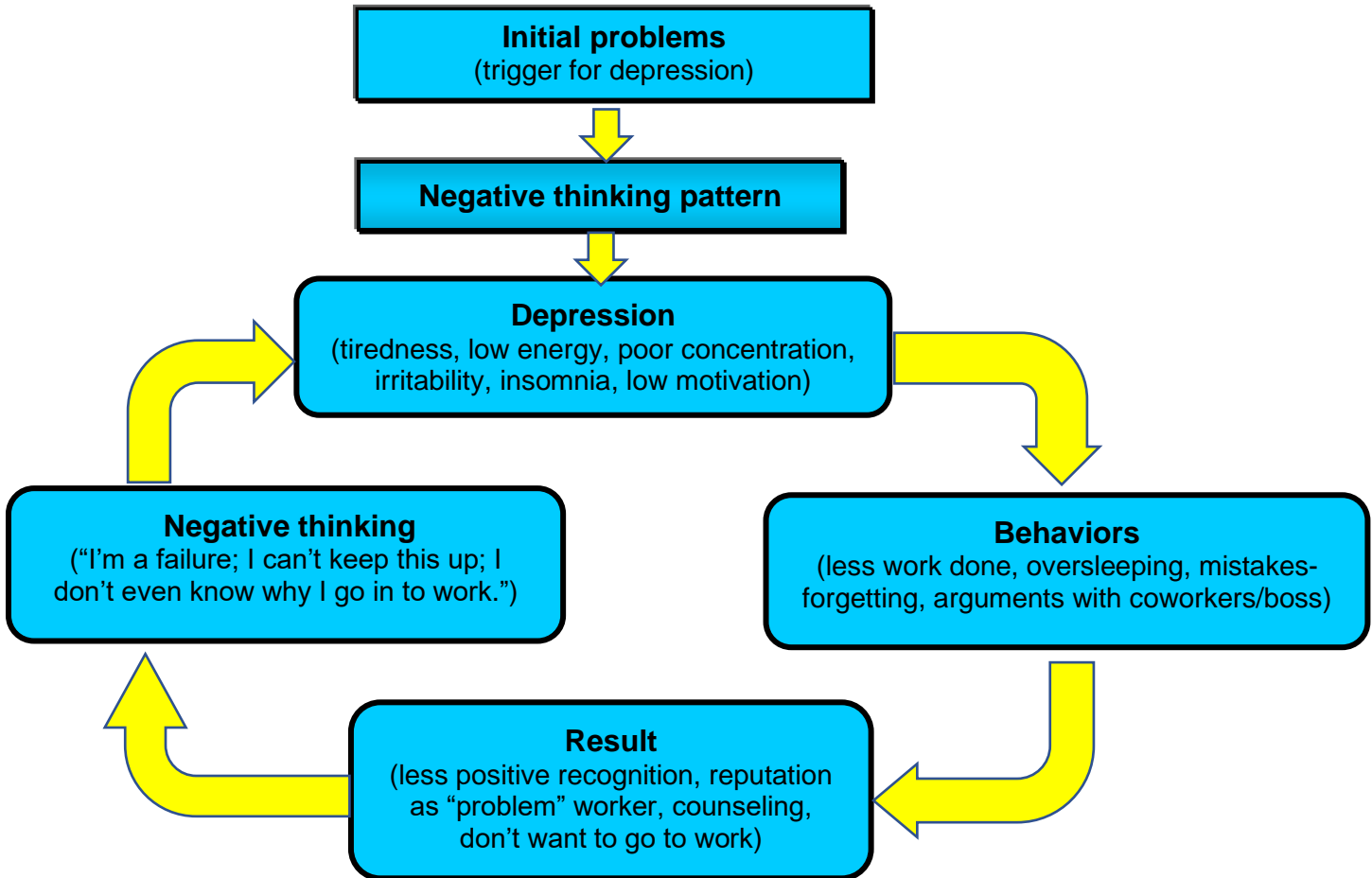
Once we are depressed, irritability can cause us to snap at friends and loved ones. It can be very easy to feel like you are on your last nerve, especially if you aren't sleeping well. Having less energy and having an urge to avoid people can lead to problems in your relationships. This behavior pattern can result in people avoiding you and may cause arguments with your friends and family. The problem of having stressful relationships can also be seen through the depressive thinking lens and lead to more depression.

How to break this cycle:

- 1) Change the depressive thinking. Interrupt the thinking cycle to relieve some of the symptoms.
- 2) Practice meditation or diaphragmatic breathing to manage your stress level and help to control your temper. Take short breaks away from others to de-stress, but be careful not to isolate yourself too much.
- 3) If relationship problems have gotten worse, consider specific ways to work on your relationships. What can you do to work on your relationships and rebuild your social support system? Use your problem-solving skills.

Secondary problems and negative behavioral cycles

Depressive cycles: Occupational/work problems



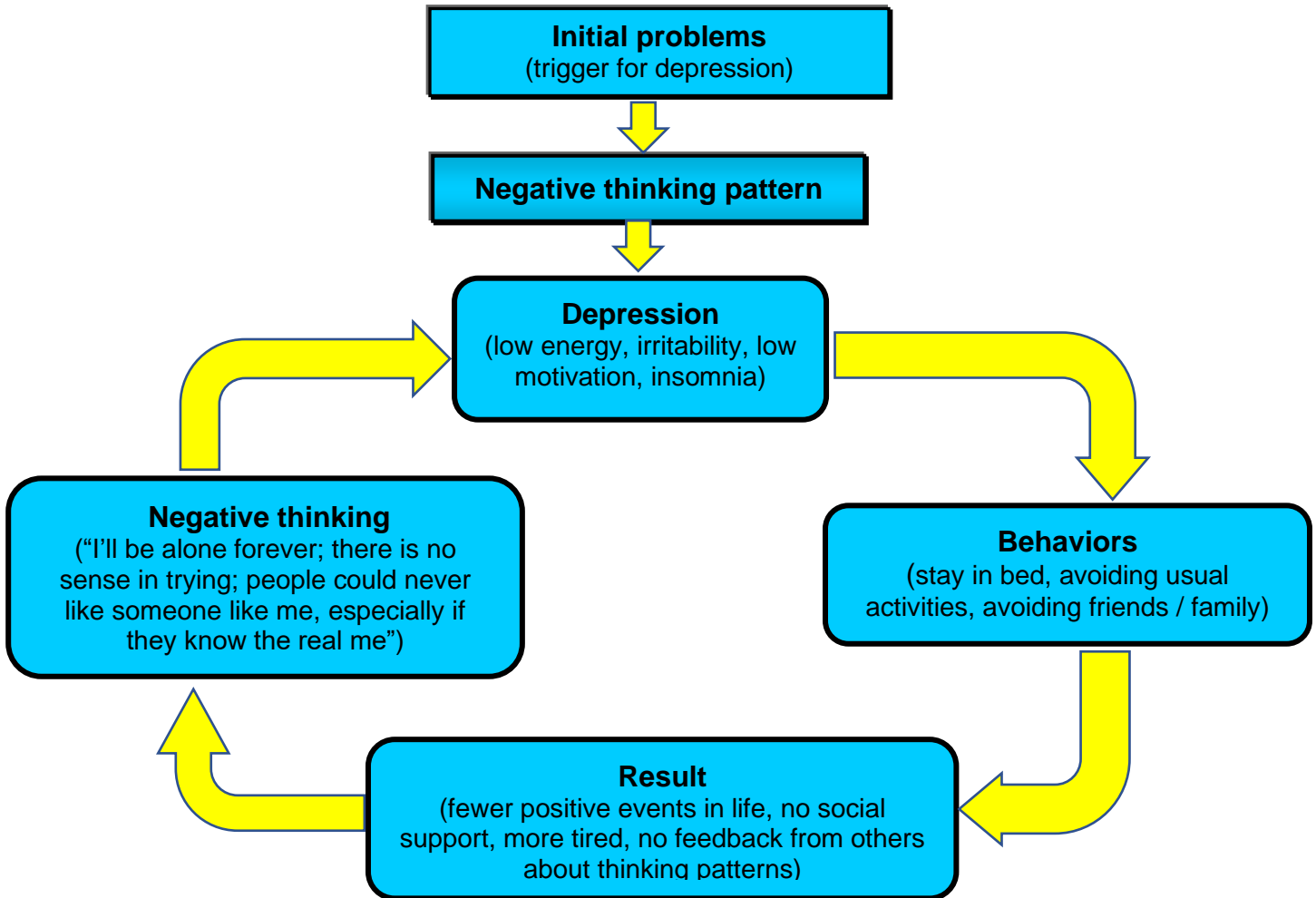
When we feel depressed, some common symptoms are tiredness, poor concentration, memory problems, irritability, and insomnia. If these symptoms affect your work, you will likely have problems such as arguments with peers, making mistakes due to memory and concentration problems, coming in late due to insomnia, etc. The result may be that you start hating going to work, get negative counselings on performance, and maybe even get a reputation as a troublemaker or problem employee.

How to break this cycle:

1. Learn to control the depressive thinking style -- for both the initial problem, and for the current problems with work. This will relieve the symptoms.
2. Use behavioral activation to regain some of your energy and normalize your sleeping patterns, which will make you less irritable and improve your concentration/memory.
3. Identify poor work environment as a problem, and use problem-solving skills to do whatever you can to improve the work climate.
4. Take antidepressants as prescribed to relieve some of the symptoms.

Secondary problems and negative behavioral cycles

Depressive cycles: Loneliness/social withdrawal



Once depressed, we seem to stay tired and have little motivation for doing things. One trap people with depression fall into is spending more and more time in bed, avoiding things that they usually do with their friends and family. This cycle leads to not doing anything during the day that gives you pleasure and spending a good deal of your time alone, dwelling on problems rather than solving them. Social isolation disables one of your best weapons against depression by cutting off your social support.

How to break this cycle:

1. Learn to control the depressive thinking style for both the initial problem and for the current problems with work. This will relieve some of the symptoms.
2. Do the behavioral activation exercises to re-establish your regular healthy routines.
3. If you have a small social support network, take steps to make it bigger. Consider joining a club or organization and getting to know others with similar interests.
4. Remember that one rule for getting over depression is that motivation works backwards: when depressed, you develop motivation *after* starting something.
5. Take antidepressants as prescribed to relieve some of the symptoms.