

Some Natural Approaches to Managing Depression

When you are depressed, it can be hard to make any changes at all, or to even feel like anything will make a difference. One thing to remember is you are never alone with this. Make a list of some people who can help you or provide support. Think about friends, family members, and the health care providers who are on your side:

There are also some support groups in the area. Check out:

NAMI (National Alliance for the Mentally Ill) 360-695-2823

CVAB (Consumer Voices are Born) 360-397-8050

Remember the Crisis Line as well: (800)626-8137 (360)696-9560

There are lots of suggestions below for dealing with depression. Some of them may apply to you and others may not. Look through the list and mark:

1. The things that sound like they may help, and
2. The things that you think you could do right now.

As you start to get better, look at the list again and see if anything else might be worth looking at.

1. Look at spirit-sapping factors in your life:

Lack of connection to your true self – Vocation (job), sexual preference, etc.
Toxic relationships - life partners, friends, coworkers, etc.
Toxic lifestyle - overwork, sleep deprivation, inactivity

2. Ask your health care provider to evaluate you and make sure there is not a physical illness (such as thyroid disease, a chronic infection, or diabetes) which could be causing your depression. Many medications and some other toxins (heavy metals, solvents like paint or gasoline) also can cause depression.

3. Look at what you eat.

A. Limit foods which may be contributing to your symptoms:

Avoid excessive caffeine and refined sugars, as well as alcohol.

MSG and nutrasweet cause problems in some people as well.

Overall, processed foods and “junk” foods contribute to depression.

Talk to your provider about the possibility of food allergies. Beware of compulsive food preferences or of eating the same food every day, all year round.

B. Increase “antidepressant” foods:

Eat protein sources rich in tryptophan vs. other amino acids:

soybeans, turkey, tofu, nuts (walnuts) and seeds

egg, dairy, millet, wheat bran

bananas, cauliflower, spinach, greens, potato

Combine above proteins with complex carbohydrates: beans, whole wheat pasta, vegetables, and grains like quinoa.

4. Vitamin, mineral, and other nutritional supplements that may help to treat depression:

B-complex (like a B-100), especially folic acid 1 mg or tetramethylhydrofolate

Zinc 15 - 60 mg per day

Calcium/magnesium (1000 mg/400 mg)

Fish oil – at least 2000 mg per day – more if you want a faster effect.

Vitamin D – cholecalciferol 2000 IU per day

5. Exercise is a fundamental part of any program for depression: in studies it worked as well as or even better than antidepressants. Try walking (or some more vigorous form of exercise) for 20 - 30 minutes per day. In research, running and weight lifting have both been shown to be effective in improving depression.
6. Light therapy: bright light in the morning can help the wintertime blues but can also help with depression not related to the season. Light boxes, such as those made by the Sunbox Company, are less expensive than they used to be and can be a great investment.
7. Learn and practice a relaxation*, meditation or yoga technique to help center yourself and control anxiety:
 - A. Try abdominal breathing; you may add a mantra or mental focus to boost the effectiveness, or even mental imagery, such as lying on a beach or floating in a warm tub. Ask for a handout if you are interested in this, or see **The Wellness Book** by Herbert Benson et al.
 - B. Try mindfulness; see **Full Catastrophe Living** by Jon Kabat-Zinn or ask for our handouts on this.
 - C. Inject humor and laughter. Try Calvin and Hobbes or your own favorite.
 - D. Connect with nature.
 - E. Listen to music that you find uplifting.
8. Talk therapy: Cognitive behavioral therapy has been shown to be effective in a timely manner. If you can't afford to see a therapist, "bibliotherapy" (the use of a book for self-help) has been proven to work (the study was done using the book **Feeling Good**, by David Burns).

Helpful websites include:

<http://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>
www.Moodgym.org

Other ideas:
Practice Gratitude. See our handout on a gratitude journal or read **Count Your Blessings**.
Work on forgiveness if you have been wronged by someone and it still eats at you. We forgive for the peace of mind it brings, not for the other person. See **Forgive for Good** by Fred Luskin.
Check out **Authentic Happiness** by Seligman.
9. Spend time with a supportive, positive group of people, whether it be Attitudinal Healing, a religious group, a 12-step program, or even just a sports league or art class.
10. Aromatherapy: essential oils may be used in a diffuser or aroma lamp, added to a hot bath, or applied to a tissue or handkerchief. Orange oil was actually proven to work in people depressed enough to be hospitalized. If anxiety is a big problem, try adding lavender.
11. There are herbal options: talk to your provider about using these safely, particularly if you take any medications.

St. John's Wort is effective for mild-moderate depression, but beware drug interactions,
Rhodiola rosea has also been shown to be effective.
Ginkgo biloba or Eleutherococcus senticosus (Siberian ginseng) may also be of some benefit.
Passionflower can help with anxiety, and valerian with sleep problems.
12. Amino acids:
 - 5HTP (5-hydroxytryptophan)
 - DLPA (d,l-phenylalanine)
 - SAMe (S-adenosylmethionine)
 - NAC (N-acetylcysteine)