

HEALTH WATCH

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Depression

Depression has become very prevalent in today's world, affecting an estimated 22% of the US population¹ and 30% of the UK population². Even more worrying is that it is increasingly affecting younger and younger people, with one study showing that it has doubled in teens in the last decade³. In South Africa, it is estimated that 1 in 12 adolescents will attempt suicide and that 9% of all teenage deaths are due to suicide⁴, as a result of depression.

There are three main types of clinical depression – major depressive and dysthymic disorders and bipolar depression. Diagnosis is generally by psychological testing (the most common being the Hamilton Rating Scale of Depression or 'HRS'), even though today it is widely recognized that nutritional deficiencies and environmental factors, such as stress, play major roles in causing depression. The trouble with this approach is that, while it can determine that a person is suffering from depression, it does nothing to identify the cause. It is generally recognized today that an imbalance of neurotransmitters in the body is responsible for depression. This would lead one to think that the obvious solution would be to check which neurotransmitters are lacking and increase them. Not so - diagnosis, as already mentioned, is almost entirely done by psychological testing, which reveals nothing about what is going on in the chemistry of the brain and the body.

Treatments for depression are almost entirely limited to the prescription of anti-depressant drugs. The problems with anti-depressant drugs are twofold:

- 1) they do nothing, or at best very little, to rectify the underlying cause of depression and
- 2) they have serious side effects, including high blood pressure, blurred vision, drowsiness, nausea, increased suicidal tendencies (a review of studies involving over 87600 people showed up to a 66% increase in suicides⁵), headaches, insomnia, sexual dysfunction, increased risk of heart disease and addiction.

In addition, there is growing evidence that anti-depressants are not nearly as effective as they are claimed to be. One study in the UK said *'the NICE guideline development group has recommended that anti-depressants should not be used for the initial treatment of mild depression, because the risk-benefit ratio is poor.'*⁶ In other studies it was found that the improvement gained by taking anti-depressants vs. placebos was only 13%⁷ and 1.7 points⁸ in HRS scores (which could have been the result of answering just 2 of the 17 questions differently). Surely these results are not good enough to warrant the side effects?

Anti-depressants have also been linked to weight gain, high blood sugar, memory loss, bone density loss and Cushing's Syndrome, a hormone disorder that can cause insulin resistance and diabetes.

Fortunately there are viable natural alternatives.

It has been shown that depression can be triggered by factors such as poor diet, deficiencies of certain nutrients, negative thinking habits, stress, low blood sugar, lack of exercise and high homocysteine levels. All of these factors can be addressed with simple lifestyle changes, without the need for drugs.

The starting point is to realize that the responsibility for one's health, physical as well as mental, lies with one's self and not with the medical profession. Just this realization, that one CAN do something about one's situation can often lead to improvement. Having a good, hard look at one's thinking patterns (negative or positive), one's diet and one's exercise habits, can lead to changes that will make profound differences in one's wellbeing.

Let's consider each of these in detail:

✓ **Thinking patterns**

Optimistic people generally suffer far less from depression than pessimists. By changing one's thinking patterns (simple but not easy), one can make a profound difference to one's mental state.

The following will help:

- counting one's blessings daily rather than focusing on what you don't have.
- mixing with positive people who encourage you and avoiding the negative ones who pull you down.
- only reading, watching and listening to uplifting, positive material.
- developing a strong faith.
- practicing monitoring one's thoughts and when a negative thought pops into your mind recognize it and change it for a positive one. Refuse to dwell on the negative!

✓ **Diet**

Foods greatly influence the brain's behaviour. A study, over a 6 year period, of over 12000 individuals showed that those who consumed the most trans and saturated fats, prevalent in modern processed and fast foods, had a 48% higher risk of suffering from depression⁹.

Our levels of neurotransmitters, which regulate our behaviour, are directly related to the nutrients we take in by what we eat. For example, serotonin is the neurotransmitter most commonly associated with mood – it is a “feel good” factor. To make serotonin we need an amino acid called tryptophan, which is found in many protein rich foods such as eggs, meat, fish, beans and seeds like sunflower seeds. *A handful of sunflower seeds is a great mood booster!* To convert the tryptophan to serotonin Omega 3, B vitamins, zinc and magnesium are required.

Omega 3 is also essential to make receptors in the brain for neurotransmitters, for transmission of nerve impulses and for normal brain functioning, assisting in preventing depression.^{10, 11, 12, 13}

The B vitamins, zinc and magnesium also help lower the homocysteine levels, which helps prevent depression.^{14, 15, 16}

High blood sugar levels also increase the incidence of depression. Sugar has very little nutrient value and depletes the B vitamins and chromium, both of which help prevent depression.^{17, 18}

A diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low in refined carbohydrates, fried foods, colourants and preservatives can make a difference for the depressed person.

Supplementing with a good multi- vitamin/mineral, vitamin B-complex and Omega 3 (all from whole food, natural sources) can make an improvement.

The very latest research indicates that the health of our digestive system can play a role in depression.¹⁹ We now know that we have a “second brain” in our gut, containing ±100 million neurons (nerve cells) and 95% of the body's serotonin. Imbalances in intestinal flora, whether from bad diet or use of antibiotics can cause disruption of the signals between the gut and the brain, lowering the immune system and affecting mood. A diet high in fibre and supplementation with a good probiotic can assist in preserving the health of our digestive system, promoting a strong immune system and stable moods.

GNLD's **FORMULA 4 PLUS** is a multi-vitamin/mineral complex of organic vitamins and minerals and is the only product in the world containing all three essential fatty acids, clinically proven to enhance cellular function, resulting in increased absorption, glandular activity and energy levels.

GNLD's **OMEGA 3 SALMON OIL PLUS** is the world's only complete Omega 3 supplement containing all 8 omega 3 factors found in nature. Both GNLD's **OMEGA 3** and **OMEGA 3 PLUS** are guaranteed pure (they are health screened for more than 160 pollutants & contaminants, with a tolerance factor of zero). The potency is also guaranteed.

GNLD's **VITAMIN B-COMPLEX** contains all the B vitamins, in their correct ratios, derived from natural, whole food sources, with a unique sustained release system to provide maximum absorption.

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GNLD's **NUTRISHAKE** is a delicious protein supplement containing all 22 amino acids that the human body needs, including tryptophan. Low in calories and containing essential vitamins and minerals, available in 3 delicious flavours, chocolate, strawberry & vanilla, it is a convenient meal replacement.

GNLD's **GR2 CONTROL WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME** is a revolutionary weight management system that regulates blood sugar levels.

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✓ Exercise

Exercising releases endorphins and encephalins, chemicals which lift the mood and help prevent depression.

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of regular exercise in reducing depression.^{20, 21, 22, 23}

Exercising in sunlight offers enhanced benefits, apart from the fresh air. Studies have shown that exercising in "full spectrum light" had a major effect on depression, decreasing subjects' HRS scores by 50% & more.²⁴ It is thought that the light increases the production of serotonin.

Getting into shape, losing weight and feeling more energetic all help to boost self-esteem and help reduce depression. Exercise helps one get rid of built-up stress and frustration, helps one sleep better, all of which can often be a problem when one is depressed.

Recognizing that one can do something to help oneself, taking action and persevering will make huge differences to one's attitude, health and general well-being. Start today, do something and the benefits will be tangible!

Recommended reading

Being Happy, Andrew Matthews, 1990

Food is Better Medicine than Drugs, Patrick Holford & Jerome Burne ,2006

References

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⁴ <http://www.southafrica.info/services/health/suicide-200207.htm>

⁵ D. Fergusson *et al*, 'Association Between Suicide Attempts & Selective Serotonin Re-uptake Inhibitors.....' *British Medical Journal* vol. 330, 2005, pg 396

⁶ http://www.nice.org.uk/usingguidance/optimalpracticereviewrecommendationreminders/optimal_practice_review_recommendation_reminders_detail.jsp?o=75

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⁸ P. Holford & J. Burne, Food is Better Medicine than Drugs, 2006, pg 182

⁹ <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0016268>

¹⁰ <http://bjp.rcpsych.org/cgi/content/abstract/188/1/46>

¹¹ <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/06/100621111238.htm>

¹² <http://psychiatry.jwatch.org/cgi/content/full/2006/208/1>

¹³ <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/omega-3-supplements-show-promise-in-alleviating-depression-111503984.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.immunesupport.com/message/same.htm>

¹⁵ http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2001/june2001_report_homocysteine.html

¹⁶ <http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/164/10/1610>

¹⁷ J.R. Davidson *et al*, 'Effectiveness of Chromium in Atypical Depression....' *Biological Psychiatry*, vol.53(3), 2003, pg. 261-4

¹⁸ L. Christensen, 'Psychological Distress and Diet – Effects of Sucrose....' *Journal of Applied Nutrition*, vol. 40(1), 1988, pg, 44-50

¹⁹ <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/05/110517110315.htm>

²⁰ <http://exercise.about.com/cs/exercisehealth/a/depression.htm>

²¹ <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/depression-and-exercise/MH00043>

²² <http://www.health.harvard.edu/newsweek/Exercise-and-Depression-report-excerpt.htm>

²³ L. Craft & F. Perna, 'The Benefits of Exercise for the Clinically Depressed', *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, vol. 6(3), 2004, pg. 104-11

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