

MENTAL HEALTH

Natural Depression Treatment

Depression is one of the most common types of mental disorders, affecting about 340 million people worldwide. Interestingly, about half of all cases of depression go undiagnosed and untreated, yet depression is the most treatable form of mental illness. Depression occurs in all age groups, social classes and cultures. It is far more common in women, affecting 25 percent of women versus about 10 percent of men. Additionally, depression also affects one out of every 20 teenagers.

It is very important to make a distinction between situational depression, which is a normal reaction to events around us, and clinical (also called endogenous) depression, which is triggered from within and is not related to external situations. Situational depression is quite common and normally follows stressful situations or losses. Rather than suppress these feelings, it is best to work through these periods with help from psychotherapists or counselors. Clinical depression is a medical diagnosis and often requires other forms of depression treatment.



Symptoms and Causes

The core symptoms of depression include:

- A sullen mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt and anxiety
- Loss of interest in things that used to be pleasurable
- Change in appetite
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Inability to concentrate
- A lack of energy or feeling run-down

Clinical depression can be triggered by a recent loss or other sad event, but then grows out of proportion to the situation and persists longer than appropriate, affecting your emotional health. While there are many theories about mood disorders, the actual causes of depression remain unclear. The current branch of medicine that addresses depression, psychiatry, is deeply founded in materialistic thinking, and believes that all mental problems stem from imbalances in brain chemistry. Hence, its total commitment to the use of drugs. While it seems likely that some cases of depression may result from deficiencies or excess neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, it makes equal sense to suggest that mood disorders actually result in disordered brain biochemistry.

Those with a family history of depression are much more likely to experience its effects at some point in their lives.

In addition, there are several factors that can precipitate depression:

- A recent loss or sad event such as the loss of a job, bereavement or social isolation
- Side effects of certain drugs
- Infections such as AIDS, mononucleosis and viral hepatitis
- Pre-menstrual syndrome
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Certain types of cancer
- Neurological disorders such as [stroke](#), [multiple sclerosis](#) and [Parkinson's disease](#)
- Nutritional deficiencies of B12 or B6

Recommended Lifestyle Changes for Depression Treatment

In Buddhist philosophy, depression represents the inevitable consequence of seeking stimulation. The centuries old teachings suggest that we seek balance in our emotional health and lives, rather than continuously striving for the highs, and then complaining about the lows that follow.

Its basic recommendation encourages the daily practice of meditation, and this is perhaps the best way to address the root of depression and change it. This requires long-term commitment, however, as meditation does not produce immediate results.

- **Exercise.** For more immediate, symptomatic depression treatment, there is no better method than regular aerobic exercise. Numerous studies have demonstrated the efficacy of a daily workout for improving emotional health and boosting self confidence. I recommend thirty minutes of continuous activity, at least five days a week for best results.
- **Check your meds.** Make sure you are not taking any over-the-counter or prescription medications that contribute to depression. Avoid all antihistamines, tranquilizers, sleeping pills and narcotics if you have any tendency toward depression. You should also be cautious about the use of recreational drugs, notably alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, downers, marijuana and ecstasy. These substances may provide a temporary sense of relief, but are likely to intensify depression to dangerous levels if used regularly.
- **Cut caffeine.** Addiction to coffee and other forms of caffeine often interferes with normal moods and can aggravate depression.
- **Try acupuncture.** This modality has proven itself to be very useful in treating several mood disorders, including depression.
- **Seek professional help.** Find a psychotherapist, mental health professional or grief counselor who can help you explore the elements contributing to your depression and facilitate recovery. Cognitive behavioral therapy can be especially helpful.
- **Anti-depressant medications.** Speak to your physician to determine if you are a candidate for anti-depressant medication. Proceed with caution, however, as an analysis by British researchers published in February, 2008, suggested that many commonly prescribed anti-depressant pharmaceuticals have limited effectiveness.

Nutrition and Supplements

- **B vitamins.** The B vitamins, especially folic acid and vitamin B6, can be helpful in mild depression, and you should know that B vitamins can increase the efficacy of prescription anti-depressants.
- **St. John's wort.** St. John's wort is an herbal remedy that has long been used in Europe as a treatment for mood disorders. Standardized extracts have shown an effectiveness equaling Prozac in the treatment of mild to moderate forms of the disease. It should not be taken with anti-retroviral medications, birth control pills, or antidepressant medications, especially SSRIs like Prozac or Celexa. Try 300mg of an extract standardized to 0.3 percent hypericin, three times a day. It's full effect will be felt in about eight weeks.
- **SAMe (S-adenosyl-L-methionine).** Has the advantage of working more quickly than St John's wort. Use only the butanedisulfonate form in enteric-coated tablets, or in capsules. Try 400-1,600 mg a day on an empty stomach.
- **Fish oil.** Recent preliminary studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil may be helpful in maintaining a healthy mind. I think that reasonable doses of fish-oil supplements (1,000 – 2,000 mg per day) might be useful in addressing mild depression. Fish oil is an excellent source of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), an essential fatty acid found in nerve and brain tissue.
- **In addition, follow a well-balanced diet** and include an antioxidant multi-vitamin/mineral supplement to ensure you are meeting your nutritional needs for all the essential nutrients.

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