

## Natural Strategies To Combat Depression

By Dr. David Schwartz, M.D.

Depression has increased in the industrial countries in the last several decades. Disability from chronic depression has risen sharply since the introduction of antidepressant drugs. We do not know how much of this rise is due to modern lifestyle or how much is due to the drugs themselves. Depression previously was an episodic condition. Usually with spontaneous and complete remission. With few recurrences and bipolar disease was uncommon before the 1950's. A similar change has taken place in regard to schizophrenia and anxiety disorders.

Evidence is poor efficacy of antidepressant drugs for mild to moderate depression. Benefits are clearer for severe depression, at least in the short term. Placebo effect is high for all antidepressants. Short term benefits are noticeable for mild to moderate depression in actual practice. Probably mainly due to placebo. The long-term outcomes show recurrence of symptoms and chronic disability in those taking the antidepressant drugs. Many people with depression convert to bipolar after starting on antidepressants.

The foregoing discussion of trends in depression patterns and use of medications is documented in detail with a multitude of references in Robert Whitaker's book Anatomy of an Epidemic (Crown Publishers).

If artificial chemicals are not the answer to most cases of depression, what can be done? Stephen S. Ilardi, Ph.D. presents in detail several effective methods for combating depression. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has been studied extensively and has been proven effective for significant improvement in symptoms of depression. The Association For Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy has information about therapists in your area at their website [www.abct.org](http://www.abct.org). CBT can help break habits of unhealthy thinking patterns, can redirect thinking and activities in positive ways and can reduce stressors in daily living.

Activities such as work, play, music, social activities, etc. can help to break up the ruminating that worsens depressive thinking and feelings.

Physical exercise is a major cornerstone of all these natural methods and has been proven to be of enormous benefit. It needs to be aerobic, about 90 minutes per week and enjoyable. Exercise is usually the last thing a depressed person wants to do, so finding creative ways to make it enjoyable is vital. Walking with a friend or a group, dancing to music or getting a personal trainer for encouragement. With any physical activity it is important to start slow and easy and to gradually increase the effort. Yoga can be very helpful for handling stress, especially deep relaxation. Writing in a journal and writing poetry can also be helpful.

Sunlight exposure (as well as supplements) helps to build Vitamin D level, which is very important for mood disorders. Bright daylight, aside from Vitamin D, helps the brain to program its rhythms and to promote positive moods. Do not use a light box if you have a bipolar condition.

Social support is vital to recovery. Cultivate positive, supportive friendships and intimate relationships; connect with self-help groups, civic organizations, possibly sports, church activities, volunteer work and animal care as well as making the best of coworker relationships. Let go of toxic relationships.

Develop healthy sleep habits to maximize good sleep and to allow adequate time for sleep.

I recommend reading Dr. Iilardi's book and implementing the details of his 6-step program. It is an excellent source of support as you work your recovery. The Depression Cure, Dr. Stephen S. Iilardi Ph.D. (DeCapo Press).

From my search of literature, other conditions related to depression which are not commonly diagnosed are adrenal exhaustion, low thyroid function not detected by tests, metabolic syndrome (a pre-diabetic condition), sex hormone imbalance, nutrient insufficiency, toxic overload, poor bowel elimination (less than 2 times a day, candida (yeast overgrowth), addictions and poor diet (fast food, sugar, white flour, factory farmed animal products, hydrogenated oils, GMO foods and other "junk").

Supplements that may help besides Omega-3 oils mentioned previously (some of which have been rigorously studied and others that have not) include: Sage, Lemon Balm, St. John's Wort, Ginkgo Biloba, Kava, Herbal Adaptogens, L-tryptophan, 5HTP, Folate, injectable Vitamin B-12 and intravenous vitamins (Myer's Cocktail). I recommend taking a high potency multi-vitamin mineral supplement, because the B vitamins, B-12 and B-6 are important for good brain function. Magnesium, Zinc and Folic Acid have been reported to be beneficial in depression. Probiotics have also been reported to be of help.

Acupuncture along with Traditional Chinese Medicine has also been effective.

For someone who is already taking antidepressant medications, the natural methods can be used concurrently with the medications, with the exception of 5HTP, which may potentiate the effects of SSRI antidepressants. Weaning off the drugs is a very delicate matter and must be done slowly. It is easy to get a relapse after getting off the medication because the brain has developed a need for it, especially if the medication has been used for a long time (months or years).