



AYOT PLACE PRACTICE

MARY BARTON B.Sc. MNIMH Dip.Phyt
Medical Herbalist

DEPRESSION

Depression can be defined as a feeling of unhappiness (perhaps very severe) which is experienced by an individual often over a long-term period. Sometimes there is an obvious cause, sometimes not. It affects young and old, male and female, of every walk of life. The illness of depression is said to affect at least three million people a year in Britain. Being depressed is like any other illness, so you do not need to be ashamed- it has nothing to do with weakness. Don't let other people make you feel bad about being depressed- you do not choose to be depressed! But you can make a positive choice not to be depressed.

It is important to remember that depression can sometimes be the result of a physical illness such as thyroid problem, anaemia, Parkinson's disease, or following serious illness such as heart attack or cancer. If you think this is the case then seek the help of your health professional.

What can be done?

Distraction from inner musings is very important in lifting the mood, at least temporarily. Those who are depressed may feel that they have no energy to do anything to help themselves, but if he or she can follow some of these steps then it can make a real difference. Sometimes sufferers will need help from others to motivate them into action and might want to ask a friend or relative to encourage them to do something when the mood is low.

1. Exercise can help and provides an immediate boost.
2. A good diet including plenty of fruit, vegetables and fibre is beneficial.
3. Try and talk to people about the problems causing the depression. Do not be afraid to ask for help.
4. Do not drown your sorrows with alcohol. This can worsen the situation.
5. Try and remember that it does pass, even though it is hard to believe at the time.
6. Try and do something different from your normal routine.
7. Try a physical therapy such as aromatherapy or massage.
8. Keep occupied if possible -any activity will help. Get out and about if you can.

9. If practical or financial problems are causing your depression, the Citizens Advice Bureau can often help. Their phone number is in the telephone directory.
10. If you can't sleep, read, watch TV, or listen to the radio.

Friends and relatives can help the sufferer through this difficult period by gently encouraging the above policies, but bear in mind that the sufferer cannot be expected to "snap out of it". His or her motivation is often non-existent. Try to be supportive and a good and patient listener, even though it can be a hard time for you personally. Do remember that depression sufferers almost invariably recover.

Herbs and Depression

Herbs contain powerful phytochemicals that can be effective in the treatment of depression. Some of the better known herbs include St John's Wort, Rosemary, Valerian and Skullcap.

If your depression is mild then self-medication can be adequate, but where it is more serious then a full consultation with a qualified herbalist can help to unravel the strands that have led to your becoming depressed. The herbalist will prepare for you an individual mixture of herbs to deal with the particular nature of your depression. The herbalist can support you emotionally by offering you a listening ear and can recommend other strategies such as massage or counselling which might benefit you.

Who else can help?

Herbalists, Counsellors, Doctors and other complementary therapists can all be of assistance

Foods for depression

Some people who are depressed lose their appetite, others eat too much- whatever your pattern, try to bear the points below in mind. Try not to be hard on yourself if your eating is out of control- for the moment, food is providing you with some emotional support- when you feel better you can concentrate on your weight.

Keeping your blood sugar level stable throughout the day is the key to balancing the emotions. To do this, eat regular meals with plenty of fibre and protein. Fibre rich foods help ward off lethargy and low mood that can be triggered by a sluggish digestion and blood sugar swings- try apples, pears, brown rice, wholemeal cereal, oats and beans. Start the day with a meal such as muesli and soya milk. Limit the use of sugar and caffeine, as they boost then deplete the energy levels.

Essential Fatty Acids (EFAs) maintain healthy brain cells that help keep emotions in balance. They are found in Linseeds, Pumpkin seeds, Walnuts, oily fish (such as Mackerel, Herring, Salmon, Sardines, Trout, Tuna), Sunflower seeds and Sesame seeds

Some foods contain substances that the body converts into mood enhancing chemicals. All are rich in tryptophan which the body can convert into Serotonin. Such foods include Sunflower seeds,

Dates, Peanuts, Avocados, Milk, and Chicken. Oats are a very good food for the emotions and also help to balance the blood sugar, so think about porridge, oat cereal bars and flapjacks

A varied diet of fresh foods will help maintain emotional health. Try limiting the intake of processed and fast foods. Also avoid foods full of toxins- try organic. To protect nerve and brain cells, eat foods rich in anti-oxidants such as strawberries and berries of all types, oranges, green leafy vegetable also nuts and seeds.

B vitamins help keep the blues at bay. You can find them in a variety of fresh foods such as fruit, vegetables and whole grains, and in some meat and fish. Try a supplement if your diet is poor. Also limit alcohol as this can have a profoundly depressing effect on the mood

You could try a good quality multivitamin and mineral supplement if your depression might result from the lack of an important nutrient.

WHEN IT'S VERY BLACK

Sometimes depression can be overwhelming - you might feel you can't go on and the only solution is to end your life. This is never a good option! Remember that when you are depressed you are not thinking straight, even though you think you are. So talk to someone, ring the Samaritans, phone a friend, make an urgent appointment with your health professional- don't delay. Or just make a deal with yourself to put it off for a day and meanwhile get talking.

If you are suffering from depression as you read this, may I just tell you that you can recover- honestly. And I hope it will happen very soon for you.

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