**Natural Treatments for Depression**

As a Holistic Health Practitioner, I've watched too many of our Modern Medicine colleagues yank out anti-depressant samples every time a patient starts to cry. I don't mean to diminish the pain someone who is depressed might experience. But tears are healthy. Sadness doesn't always need treatment. And it's important to remember that the pain muscle and the joy muscle are the same. If you can't feel one, you won't feel the other.

That said, clinical depression sucks, and if you're someone who suffers from it, my heart goes out to you. I'm in no way intending to diss anti-depressants or suggest you ignore your doctor's advice. I know anti-depressants can be life-saving for people. But unless you're suicidal or otherwise in dire need of urgent medication, before you dose up on side-effect laden pharmaceuticals, it's worth considering some natural treatments that might help lift your mood.

**How To Treat Depression Naturally**

**1. Analyze**

Consider why you might feel depressed. Sometimes depression is a symptom of something circumstantial in your life, rather than biochemical imbalances. Does your job require you to sell out your integrity every day? Have you been unable to admit that you need to end your marriage? Are you feeling spiritually disconnected or sexually restless? Are you suffering from creative blocks? Is your body failing you? Are you facing financial ruin? Be honest with yourself about what might be off-kilter in your life, and make an effort to get to the root of why you might be feeling depressed.

**2. Exercise**

Move your body. Exercise releases happy-making endorphins, which act like natural anti-depressants. Runner's high, anyone?

**3. Never Skip A Meal**

Keeping your blood sugar stable reduces mood swings.

**4. Avoid Caffeine**

which reduces serotonin levels. If you need an energy boost, supplement with L-Tyrosine (500 - 1000 mg).

**5. Expose Yourself To Sunlight**

 Sunlight can boost mood and increase Vitamin D levels. If you live somewhere that gets little sun, invest in a therapeutic light box.

**6. Try Mood-enhancing Supplements**

(DISCLAIMER: Although you can get these supplements over the counter, I always recommend doing this under the care of a physician, since supplements can have side effects and risks and can interact with other medications.)

***5-HTP 50-300 mg up to three times/day*** -- start at 50mg in the morning. Converts directly into serotonin. If you are taking too much, you will feel sleepy or have runny stools. Also usually helps with anxiety, although sometimes it can paradoxically cause anxiety. Must use with great caution if you're taking an anti-depressant.

***St. John's Wort 300mg three times/day.*** If you don't feel better within a week, slowly increase your dose to a max of 600mg three times/day. May decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills.

***SAMe 200mg on an empty stomach twice/day.*** Increase your dose every two weeks to a maximum dose of 600mg twice daily. This can be a very effective antidepressant, but it can also be expensive. Side effects at higher doses include GI upset, nausea, agitation, and insomnia.

***L-Theanine 100-600mg daily.*** Reduce if you feel sleepy. Found in green tea.

Fish oil (DHA/EPA) 1-3 g/day with food.

**7. Meditate or Try Guided Imagery**

Meditation's effects on mood are well documented. Settling your mind can lift your mood, in addition to a whole host of other health benefits.

**8. Get Your Hormones Balanced**

If your thyroid, adrenal or sex hormones are out of whack, your mood can get all wonky. See a good integrative medicine doctor and ask them to order and interpret the following tests:

Thyroid gland tests - TSH, free T4, free T3, total T3, thyroid antibodies

Adrenal gland tests - cortisol, DHEA-S, pregnenolone

Sex hormone tests - estradiol, progesterone, free and total testosterone

**9. Be Yourself**

Make efforts to bolster your mental health by being more authentic in all aspects of your life. Too often, we walk around wearing masks, pretending to be something we're not. We fake it at the schoolyard, in the boardroom, in the bedroom, at church -- and then we wonder why we wind up depressed. Consider signing up for this e-course about getting in touch with your authentic self. Practice letting your freak flag fly and watch how your mood lifts.

**10. Practice Mindfulness**

A depressed mind tends to mull over all that is wrong and worries unnecessarily about all the negative possibilities that may emerge in the future. This negative thought cycle reinforces misery and is not helpful in managing to overcome depression. Mindfulness involves focusing on the present moment and is a skill that needs to be practiced. More often than not, our brains are full of thoughts and focusing on the present moment seems unnatural for our minds. Practice on engaging your senses in the moment. Focus on touch, taste, sight, sound and smell. Engaging the senses leaves less time for worry.

**11. Listen to Upbeat Music**

I have always thought of music as food for the soul. An upbeat tune can change an atmosphere instantly and create a more positive vibe. Listening to upbeat, happy music alters brain chemistry and can improve your mood.

**12. Use Touch**

Science shows that touch therapies can help some people overcome depression, lower the stress hormone cortisol and increase the feel-good hormone oxytocin. Therapies to consider include acupuncture, acupressure, massage, reiki and reflexology.

**13. Include Omega 3 Fatty Acids in Your Diet**

Research has shown that depressed people often lack a fatty acid known as EPA. Participants in a 2002 study featured in the Archives of General Psychiatry took just a gram of fish oil each day and noticed a 50-percent decrease in symptoms such as anxiety, sleep disorders, unexplained feelings of sadness, suicidal thoughts, and decreased sex drive. Omega-3 fatty acids can also lower cholesterol and improve cardiovascular health. Get omega-3s through walnuts, flaxseed and oily fish like salmon or tuna.

**14. Stop the Negative Self Talk**

Depressed people tend to see the world in a negative way. When things go wrong they blame themselves and when they go right, they put it down to luck. Depression reinforces self doubt and feelings of worthlessness. Monitor your inner negative talk and make allowances for this type of thinking by reminding yourself that your thinking is that of a depressed person, not a healthy functioning person. Don’t take your thoughts seriously when you are feeling low. Acknowledge the thoughts but this doesn’t mean you have to believe them. Keep perspective.

**15. Bide Your Time**

Accept that your mental state is not entirely balanced. During depression, we tend to see the negatives in everything and find it harder to be balanced about what is going on. Gently remind yourself that you are tuned into the ‘negativity channel’ and don’t listen to your thinking. It is definitely distorted when you are depressed. This idea alone can provide some comfort when the world appears bleak. It won’t last forever. Remind yourself that change is constant and that you won’t always feel this way. Be patient and do your best to look after yourself in the meantime. Eat well and get a decent amount of sleep. Say to yourself “This shall pass”.

**16. Distract Yourself**

If possible, do your best to distract yourself from over thinking. Your thoughts are your enemy when depression sets in. Play with a pet or go for a walk. Read a book if you are able to concentrate or finish a puzzle. Do anything that takes your mind off your fears and worries. Keeping busy is an effective way to overcome depression.

**17. Use More Light**

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is known for causing low mood over the winter months when there is less sunlight. Invest in a sunlamp – a 300 watt bulb within three feet for 20 minutes three times a day can help. SAD symptoms can include problems sleeping, anxiety, depression, irritability, fatigue, apathy and loss of libido and using light can help to overcome depression and these other symptoms.

**18. Connect with Friends**

This can be one of the hardest things to do when feeling depressed but it is one of the most rewarding activities. Force yourself to go out. Isolating oneself from others may seem a good idea but put a limit on it and then get out there again. This can have a huge positive effect on your mood.

**19. Try Cognitive Therapy**

Cognitive therapy can be extremely useful in counteracting depression and is based on the principle that certain ways of thinking can trigger certain health problems, such as depression. The counselor helps you to understand your current thought patterns and identify any harmful or false ideas and thoughts that you have that can trigger depression or make it worse. The aim is to change your ways of thinking to avoid these ideas as well as help your thought patterns to be more realistic and helpful.

**20. Write in a Journal**

A journal can work in two ways. Use it to write down fears and worries. Sometimes, having an outlet in this way can be soothing and ease your mind. Another good way to use a journal (I prefer this way) is to write at least five things down every day that you are grateful for. This forces us to think more positively and can help to remind us that things are never that bad. In a gratitude journal, you can write about anything that happened in the day that made you feel appreciative. A stranger smiling at you, the sun shining..anything positive will do!

**21. Get Enough Sleep**

Sleep and mood are closely connected. Inadequate sleep can cause irritability and stress, while healthy sleep can enhance well-being. Studies have shown that even partial sleep deprivation has a significant effect on mood.Take steps to ensure adequate sleep will this will lead to improved mood and well-being. The quality of your sleep directly affects the quality of your waking life, including your mental sharpness, productivity, emotional balance, creativity, physical vitality, and even your weight. No other activity delivers so many benefits with so little effort so aim for between 7.5 and 9 hours sleep per night.

**22. Forgive Others**

When we hold a grudge, we are the ones that feel the anger. The person whom we are angry with is probably merrily going about their business completely oblivious to your feelings. Don’t allow others to have this power over you. They have may have caused you grief in the past, try not to allow that grief to continue – it only affects you, not them. Find a way to forgive – they are not worthy of your time. Lighten the emotional load and you will improve your mood and help you to overcome depression.

**23. Don’t give up**

Depression can make you want to hide away from the world and disappear. It’s okay to take some time out but give yourself a time limit and then do something productive to improve your mood. Depression can be well managed (I know this from personal experience) and there can be a wonderful life beyond depression. Hang in there and keep the faith.

Although the above suggestions can be effective, depression that perseveres should be investigated further and seeing a Doctor to chat over any symptoms is a step in the right direction.

**24. Talk it out**

See a therapist, psychiatrist, or life coach and express how you feel. Sometimes just finding someone you trust who will help you work through your feelings can make all the difference in the world.

**25 Last Result See Your Physician**

If all else fails and you need anti-depressants, don't beat yourself up. Sometimes you can do everything right, and if your imbalance is biochemical, you may need the drugs. But don't forget to nurture the rest of you too. Depression, like most physical and mental illnesses, is multifactorial and requires a global investigation of your whole health -- not just your mind and body, but your relationships, your work, your financial picture, how you express yourself creatively, how you satisfy yourself sexually, your environment, and whether you're letting your Inner Pilot Light (aka authentic self) shine.