

Depression: Complementary/Alternative Medicine

The official definition of clinical depression, according to the American Psychiatric Association in its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM4VJ)*, is based on the following eight primary criteria:

1. Poor appetite accompanied by weight loss, or increased appetite accompanied by weight gain
2. Insomnia or excessive sleep habits (hypersomnia)
3. Physical hyperactivity or inactivity
4. Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities, or decrease in sexual drive
5. Loss of energy; feelings of fatigue
6. Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, or inappropriate guilt
7. Diminished ability to think or concentrate
8. Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

The presence of five of these eight symptoms definitely indicates clinical depression; an individual with four is probably depressed. According to the *DSM4V* the symptoms must be present for at least one month to be called depression. Clinical depression is also referred to as *major depression* or *unipolar depression*.

QUICK REVIEW

Approximately seventeen million Americans suffer from true clinical depression each year, and over twenty eight million Americans take antidepressant drugs or anxiety medications.

One of the most powerful techniques for producing the necessary biochemical changes in the brains of depressed individuals is to teach them to be more optimistic.

- Low levels of serotonin contribute to depression.
- It is important to rule out the simple organic factors that are known to contribute to depression, i.e., nutrient deficiency or excess, drugs (prescription, illicit, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, etc.), hypoglycemia, consumption, hormonal derangement, allergy, environmental factors, and microbial factors.
- Cognitive therapy has been shown to be as effective as antidepressant drugs in treating moderate depression.
- Depression is often a first or early manifestation of thyroid disease.
- Increased cortisol levels are common in depression.

Elimination of sugar and caffeine has been shown to produce significant benefits in clinical trials.

Increased participation in exercise, sports, and physical activities is strongly associated with decreased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and malaise.

A deficiency of any single nutrient can alter brain function and lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders.

Hypoglycemia can cause depression.

- An insufficiency of omega-3 oils in the diet has been linked to depression.

Numerous double-blind studies have shown 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) to be as effective as antidepressant drugs, but it is better tolerated and is associated with fewer and much milder side effects.

Extracts of St. John's wort standardized for hypericin (usually 0.3 percent) are the most thoroughly researched natural antidepressants.

Over twenty-five double-blind studies have shown St. John's wort to produce as good or better results compared to standard antidepressant drugs, but with significantly fewer side effects.

TREATMENT SUMMARY

Treatment is largely dependent on a few central elements: accurate determination of which factors are contributing to the depression; balancing of errant neurotransmitter levels; and optimizing nutrition, lifestyle, and psychological health.

Diet

Increase the consumption of fiber-rich plant foods (fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, and raw nuts and seeds). Avoid the intake of caffeine, nicotine, other stimulants, and alcohol. Identify and control food allergies.

Lifestyle

Follow the recommendations given in the chapter A POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE.

In addition, consult with a counselor to learn skills and tools that will help you attain a positive, optimistic mental attitude. Get regular exercise—at least thirty minutes at least three times per week—and practice a relaxation/stress reduction technique for ten to fifteen minutes each day.

Nutritional Supplements

- High-potency multiple vitamin and mineral
- Vitamin C: 500-1,000 mg three times per day
- Vitamin E: 200-400 IU per day
- Flaxseed oil: 1 tablespoon per day
- 5-HTP: 100-200 mg three times per day

Vitamin D3 2,000 units up to ten caps daily divided as dosing 2-3 times over the day

Folic acid and vitamin B12: 800 mcg of each per day

Botanical Medicines

If under the age of fifty, St. John's wort ~, extract (0.3% hypericin): 300 mg three times per day.
In severe cases, St. John's wort extract can be used in combination with 5-HTP
If over the age of fifty, *Ginkgo biloba* extract (24% ginkgo flavonglycosides): 80 mg three times per day.
In severe cases, can be used in combination with St. John's wort and/or 5-HTP
If anxiety is a significant factor, kava extract standardized for kavalactone content: 45-70 mg kavalactones three times per day.

There is a local support group in Jupiter-Tequesta;

www.DBSEAlliance.org

(800) 826-3632