

Shining a Light On Depression

How to Overcome Depression Naturally without Potentially Dangerous Drugs



Are you feeling depressed? If not, there's a good chance you know someone who is, since about 7% of the American population has a major depressive episode each year. That's over 17 million people. To look at the problem differently, about 10% of all doctor and hospital visits are about depression.

Being depressed is nothing to be ashamed of. Just about everyone will become depressed at one time in their lives. It's perfectly natural to feel depressed if you've lost a loved one or have suffered a major setback in life, such as the loss of a job or home. Most of the time this depression is temporary and you'll get over it naturally without any intervention, medical or otherwise.

However, in recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the use of antidepressant drugs to treat people with depression. Drug prescriptions for depression have increased by over 400% in the last two decades. (*Antidepressant Use Up 400 Percent in US by Janice Wood, psychcentral.com.*) That means that about 12% of the population are taking antidepressants each month. (*Percentage of Americans Taking Antidepressants Climbs by Jun Yan, psychnews.psychiatryonline.org.*) That's a big change because only a few decades ago only one person in 50 or 2% of the population were on antidepressant drugs.

Why the change? Are we becoming more depressed as a nation, or are antidepressants being over-prescribed? It might be a combination of both, but whatever the answer, the high percentage of people on antidepressant drugs is cause for concern.



SSRIs: The Most Commonly Prescribed Antidepressants

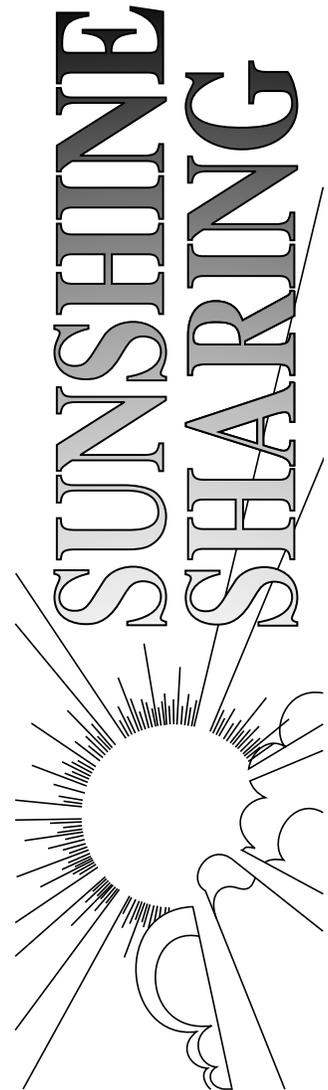
To understand why you should be concerned about our drug-based approach to depression, let's look at the most common category of antidepressant drugs—Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs).

SSRIs were developed in the 1980s. They work by inhibiting the nerve cells releasing serotonin from reabsorbing it. Blocking the reuptake of serotonin increases its activity in the brain. SSRIs were developed to treat severe depression, but they are now widely used for mild to moderate depression, as well as other conditions like anxiety, sleep disturbances and neuropathic pain.

Although they can relieve feelings of severe depression, SSRIs, like other drugs, are not without side effects. A 2009 study of 700 patients taking SSRIs found the following side effects in the group: 56% experienced decreased sexual functioning, 53% drowsiness and 49% gained weight. Less common side effects were dry mouth (19%), insomnia (16%), fatigue (14%), nausea (14%), light-headedness (13%) and tremor (12%).

These side effects might be worth the risk for someone who is severely depressed, but there are more issues with SSRIs than those listed in this study. The FDA itself issued a black box warning, which is the strictest warning the agency can give, in 2004. They warned that SSRIs were associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviors. The warning was updated in 2007 to specify that the highest risk was for young adults and children under the age of 24.

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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Managing Editor/Writer: Steven Horne
Editor: David Horne
Associate Editors: Carolyn Hughes, Katie Horne

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This is important to know as suicide rates have dramatically increased in recent years. Rates have gone up 30% in the past two decades. Suicide is now the 10th leading cause of death in the United States and the 2nd leading cause of death among young people age 15-29. Obviously, it's a bad idea for young people who are depressed to be taking SSRIs if it increases suicide risk.

Other known side effects of SSRIs include mania, increased aggression and violent behavior and psychosis. People on SSRIs are more likely to fight with spouses, bosses and even police, causing problems with work, marriage and other conflicts. For a better understanding of why, read the sidebar, *Enhancing Serotonin Naturally* below.

Treating Depression without Drugs

In spite of the wide-spread use of SSRIs, depression is not just a deficiency of serotonin. It has numerous causes, both physical and psychological. For example, new research suggests depression may involve inflammation in the brain. It may also be caused by problems with the GI tract, liver, dopamine neurons, hormonal imbalances like low thyroid and much more. All of these issues, and even low levels of serotonin, can be addressed with herbs and nutritional supplements, especially in mild to moderate depression.

Most of the time, the cause of depression isn't even physical. People get depressed when they suffer loss and experience grief, when they're under excessive stress and when they feel life has no higher meaning. Although good nutrition and supplements may offer support in these situations, people usually need assistance in learning how to cope with their problems. Many people turn to professional counselors, pastors, ministers and even good friends to help find their way through these difficulties. Counseling has about the same success rate as SSRIs in overcoming depression, without the potential side effects.

Nutrition and Depression

Unfortunately, when a person is feeling depressed they usually don't take good care of themselves. They binge out on junk food, eat too much or lose their appetite. Oddly enough, high carbohydrate meals temporarily stimulate dopamine and serotonin, which causes a brief elevation of mood. Unfortunately, this is followed by an even larger emotional let down. Rapid fluctuations in blood sugar also adversely affect mood.

One of the first steps to overcoming depression is to simply start taking better care of yourself. Diet-wise, eating fresh fruits and vegetables and getting adequate amounts of protein will help



Enhancing Serotonin Naturally

The nerve cells that release serotonin are located at the base of the skull. They serve to connect nerves in the spinal column with the brain, thus forming a link between mind and body.

These serotonin neurons fire steadily when awake, slow down when asleep and stop firing while dreaming. Interestingly, LSD causes hallucinations by blocking serotonin receptors causing the brain to enter an ungrounded dream-like state.

Research shows that serotonin neurons are involved in the drive for status and achievement. People who have achieved a high degree of status in life have higher levels of serotonin. Psychologist, Dr. Jordan Peterson says this is even true for lobsters. When a dominant lobster is defeated by a stronger lobster, the loser suffers a loss of serotonin. Given SSRIs, the losing lobster may return and fight again.

This explains why people given SSRIs may become more aggressive and violent. Having felt defeated in life, they may begin to fight back, but not necessarily in constructive ways.

Given these neurons are located at the base of the skull, it's interesting to note that you will slump forward and hang your head if you're feeling defeated. But, what's even more interesting is that by throwing your shoulder's back, lifting your head and determining to do something worthwhile in life, you can automatically increase the activity of your serotonin neurons.

Serotonin is produced from the amino acid tryptophan. Serotonin levels in the brain are directly linked with levels of tryptophan. Oddly enough, tryptophan was withdrawn from the US market as a supplement, due to problems created by a contaminated batch of the supplement (not a problem with the supplement itself), shortly before the introduction of SSRIs.

Fortunately, a derivative of tryptophan, **5-HTP** was discovered which can be taken to naturally boost serotonin levels in the brain. Taking 5-HTP is a natural alternative to SSRIs, but should not be taken while a person is on an SSRI.

When it gets dark the pineal gland converts serotonin to melatonin which aids sleep, so taking 5-HTP about one hour before bedtime may help some people get to sleep. It also helps some people with carbohydrate cravings.

St. John's wort has also been shown to modulate serotonin and research suggests it can help relieve mild to moderate depression. St. John's wort does much more than affect serotonin. It also modulates levels of dopamine, GABA and other neurotransmitters involved in anxiety and depression. It helps regulate the digestion and reduces inflammation, too.

St. John's wort blooms around the summer solstice and is traditionally associated with increasing light in a person and chasing away the darkness. It is especially good for depression associated with digestive upset and anxiety. However, it should not be taken with SSRIs or other drugs that modulate serotonin levels.

to improve mood. Exercise has been shown to lift depression. Just walking for 30-60 minutes a day in the fresh air and sunshine will help. It also helps to get a good night's sleep.

There are also a few basic nutritional supplements that may help, when a depressed person has been eating a lot of sugar and other refined carbohydrates, they will benefit from taking an **Anti-Stress Vitamin Supplement** containing B-complex vitamins, vitamin C and herbs like schizandra and passionflower. Simple carbohydrates deplete these vitamins, which are needed for neurotransmitter synthesis in the brain.

Essential fatty acids are also important to nerve function and may help depression and other nervous system disorders. So an **omega-3 essential fatty acid** supplement may also be helpful.

The Inflammation-Depression Link

Recent research suggests that there is a link between chronic inflammation and depression. While the inflammation is not the direct cause of depression, it appears that in many people, reducing chronic inflammation eases depression.

That's one reason why eating fresh fruits and vegetables, avoiding refined carbohydrates, and taking omega-3 essential fatty acids are good basic therapies for depression. All of these things reduce chronic inflammation.

Where depression is associated with chronic inflammation, a person may experience general aches and pains, have a dark red or purplish colored tongue and high levels of C-reactive protein. If this is the case try an **Anti-Inflammatory Formula**. The blend should contain herbs like turmeric, boswellia, mangosteen and willow bark. You can also take turmeric or its principle constituent **curcumin** as a supplement to reduce chronic inflammation.

Removing Specific Causes of Depression

Depression is just a symptom. To actually get rid of it, you need to identify the cause or causes and remove them. So, beyond these general suggestions, you should try to identify the specific causes to select effective therapies. Here are some factors to consider.

Depression Caused by Grief and Sadness



When depression is due to a recent tragedy in one's life, such as the death of a loved one, a breakup, loss of a job or other difficulties, it is a natural part of the grieving process. There are five recognized stages of grieving. These are 1. Denial and isolation; 2. Anger; 3. Bargaining; 4. Depression; and finally 5. Acceptance.

Although not everyone experiences all five stages, nor do they occur in any particular order, depression is a common part of the grieving process. Recognize that this kind of depression is not a disease, so it shouldn't require drugs for healing. Instead, it's a sign that the depressed person needs emotional help and support, as well as time to go through their grieving process.

There are a few essential oils (EOs) that can help to lift the spirits of a grieving person. **Rose EO** helps to heal depression

brought on by grief by opening the heart to the experience of love again. The oils of pine, bergamot or helicysum may also help with the grieving process. A **Grief-Relieving Flower Essence** blend containing the flower essences of self-heal, love-lies-bleeding, bleeding heart and borage can also help the person emotionally release what they have lost.



Stress-Related Depression

Stress can bring us down and make us feel tired and overwhelmed. If a person's depression is related to stress, it will be accompanied by anxiety and nervousness. There may also be severe fatigue, a loss of interest in life and the feeling "I just can't cope anymore!"

If this fits you, try the **Anti-Stress Vitamin Supplement** mentioned earlier along with a **Chinese Fire Increasing Formula** containing the key herbs schizandra, biota and cistanche. If the stress

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Weaning Off Antidepressants



People taking antidepressant drugs like SSRIs should not discontinue them abruptly. This can be very dangerous. The FDA has warned that abrupt changes in the dose (whether increasing or decreasing it) can produce hostility, psychosis and increase the risk of suicide. The brain adjusts to the presence of these chemicals, which means that the balance of the neurotransmitters abruptly changes when the dose is altered.

The daily dose should be reduced slowly over the course of many months, or even years. This is done by shaving very small amounts off of the pills, as opposed to trying to cut them. This should be done, ideally under professional supervision, over the course of many months. If a person has been on SSRIs or other antidepressants for more than five years, it's a good idea to spend a year weaning off of them.

It's also important to know that St. John's wort is contraindicated when taking SSRIs and other antidepressants like MAO inhibitors. One can start to use small amounts of **5-HTP** and gradually increase the dose as the dose of the antidepressant is reduced.

While transitioning, it's important to work on one's general health. Eat a healthy diet, get adequate sleep and work on worthwhile goals. A good cleanse may be helpful (as described on page 4), as well as supporting the detoxifying capacity of the liver.

One formula many people have found helpful in weaning off of antidepressants is a **Chinese Sagging Chi Formula**. It contains key herbs like perilla, cyperus, bamboo sap, and bupleurum. It helps to gently detoxify the system while stimulating energy. Because it does not directly affect serotonin metabolism it is safe to use while taking the SSRIs.

For more information on weaning off of SSRIs go to <https://www.drugawareness.org/icfda-warning/>

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AskMara.com & Energy Wellness Products

Mara Gerke

9898 N 200 E, Decatur, IN 46733

Phone: 800-728-2425

Website: <http://www.askmara.com/>

Email: askmara@gmail.com



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has been intense enough to cause post traumatic stress disorder, an **Adrenal Glandular Formula** containing adrenal substance, vitamins C, pantothenic acid, magnesium and schizandra may prove helpful.

Disturbed Methylation

Disturbed methylation may be involved in depression, anxiety and even mental illness. Signs of under methylation include high levels of homocysteine and histamine in the blood, a tendency to seasonal allergies and depression that responds favorably to SSRIs.

If you have symptoms of under methylation, you might try taking **SAM-e**. Studies suggest SAM-e can be effective for mild to moderate depression. It helps the body produce more mood-enhancing neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin and acts as a natural reuptake inhibitor for these neurotransmitters. It also aids liver detoxification, which aids the next cause of depression.

Toxicity and Depression

Depression was once called melancholia and was thought to be an accumulation of black bile. Today we'd consider black bile an accumulation of toxins.

More serotonin is produced in the gut than in the brain and gut health has been directly linked with mood problems like anxiety and depression. The liver also breaks down excess hormones and neurotransmitters, so when the liver isn't detoxifying well one can become irritable, anxious or depressed.

Doing a **Chinese Cleansing Programing** can help a person feel lighter, have more energy and reduce feelings of heaviness. The cleansing program contains burdock, black walnut, psyllium, a lower bowel formula and a **Chinese Wood Decreasing Formula** that contains the key herb bupleurum. In Traditional Chinese Medicine bupleurum is said to "dredge" the liver of anger and sadness.

Seasonal Depression

Many people get depressed in winter, a condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder. One of the causes of this may be a

lack of **vitamin D3**, which is produced in the skin in response to sunlight. Taking 2000 IU of vitamin D3 daily can cause significant improvement in seasonal depression. **St. John's wort** may also be helpful for seasonal depression, as well as using full spectrum lights.

Age-Related Depression

As a person ages, they may become depressed. This may be associated with dementia or the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. **Ginkgo** has been helpful for this type of depression. **Ginseng** and **gotu kola** may also be helpful.

Depression and Hormones

Depression associated with PMS, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause is typically hormonally related. An herb that is often helpful in these cases is **black cohosh**. It is also a good antidepressant for women who feel trapped or anyone who feels like they are wrestling with darkness, like the cartoons with the "black cloud" following a person around. **Damiana** is another mood elevator, which can treat depression in both men and women caused by low reproductive hormones.

The thyroid plays an important role in mood regulation. Hypothyroidism is often overlooked as a possible cause of depression. If you have fatigue, problems losing weight, dry skin, low body temperature and/or high cholesterol levels, low thyroid may be a contributing factor to your depressed feelings. If low thyroid is a factor, feeding the thyroid gland with a **Hypothyroid Formula**, containing herbs like kelp and dulse, may help.

Additional Help and Information

The conditions discussed in this newsletter aren't the only factors in depression. For more information about overcoming depression naturally you can contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

<https://www.drugawareness.org/>

Modern Herbal Medicine by Steven Horne and Thomas Easley

<https://www.webmd.com/depression/features/natural-treatments#1>

<https://draxe.com/health/natural-remedies-depression/>