

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Natural Solutions for Depression: Part I

Dr. Smith is concerned about the sharp rise in depression rates over recent years. Each year, more and more children and adults experience depression, and many turn to antidepressant medications that are loaded with side effects.



What triggered the increased incidence? Researchers theorize that everything from diet to stress to lack of exercise may play a crucial role. Fortunately, a wealth of scientific evidence indicates that, for many individuals, simple lifestyle changes can go a long way in reducing symptoms.

Doctors of chiropractic do not diagnose or treat psychological problems, such as depression. However, Dr. Smith can share research revealing natural solutions with patients.

Quell Chronic Pain

Unrelenting pain is more than just annoying; it's downright depressing, and research proves it. Studies show that frequent or chronic neck or back pain is often accompanied by bouts of moderate to severe depression.

And drugs designed to mask the pain are no solution: Potential side effects may spawn even more problems. Why not stop the pain at its source? Chronic back and neck pain are often caused

by a common malady called **vertebral subluxation**. It's a condition that occurs when movement and spinal bones (vertebrae) are restricted. The good news is that Dr. Smith eliminates vertebral subluxations with specialized and precise maneuvers called **chiropractic adjustments**.

While chiropractors do not treat depression, research demonstrates that chiropractic adjustments may ease depressive symptoms. "It has been long speculated that chiropractic interventions may affect mental health problems," note researchers.

To test this hypothesis, investigators followed 15 adults who were both clinically depressed and had a vertebral subluxation in the spine of their upper neck.

Before and after receiving a chiropractic adjustment, the subjects completed a standard assessment for depression called the Beck Depression Inventory II.

Results revealed a marked reduction in depression scores following the intervention (*Journal of Vertebral Subluxation Research* 2005:1-4).

Exercise

Research shows that exercise works wonders to stave off depression. One study found that it's **as effective** as antidepressants for moderate depression, without the potential side effects. In one study, 156 subjects with major depressive disorder, who were 50

years of age or older, were prescribed exercise, medication or a combination of both.

Although patients receiving drugs showed faster initial results, after 16 weeks both exercise and antidepressants were "equally effective," with "essentially identical" scores on depression tests. Researchers concluded that "an exercise training program may be considered an alternative to antidepressants for treatment of depression in older persons." (*Arch Intern Med* 1999;159:2349-56.)

Additional research shows that exercise may surpass antidepressants when it comes to preventing depression relapses over the long term (*Psychosom Med* 2000;62:633-8).

And, even mild exercise, such as walking, has immense benefits, according to new research. The study consisted of 38 patients who had endured a major depression episode during an initial phase of standard antidepressant medication.

In a 10-day experiment, 20 patients participated in daily walking, while 18 patients in a placebo group performed low-intensity stretching and relaxation techniques.



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The researchers used two standard clinical tests to assess each participant's severity of depression throughout the study. After only 10 days, the exercise group experienced a significant drop in depression scores, compared with the placebo group.

While 65 percent of exercising patients experienced a "clinical response" — a reduction in depression scores by more than six points — only 22 percent of the placebo group enjoyed similar results. "Endurance exercise may help to achieve substantial improvement in the mood of selected patients with major depression in a short time," conclude the authors (*Br J Sports Med* 2006;40:10).

Remember, when it comes to exercise, something is better than nothing. Even short bouts of exercise diminish depression, say researchers in Germany.

The investigation included 12 patients, with an average age of 49, who suffered severe depression. All subjects appreciably improved after engaging in 30 minutes of exercise for only 10 days. "Aerobic exercise can produce substantial improvement in mood in patients with major depressive disorders in a short time," concluded the study's authors (*Br J Sports Med* 2001;35:114-7).

Avoid Alcohol

Alcohol is a natural depressant. Drinking alcohol can affect moods for hours or even days later. Limit alcohol consumption or consider skipping it entirely.

Be Wary of Medication

A plethora of prescription and over-the-counter medications may cause depression. That's why it's best to seek natural alternatives whenever possible.

Stimulate the Mind

The adage "use it or lose it" is especially fitting when it comes to the mind. Scholars report that cognitive vitality is essential to keep depression at bay.

But just how do you maintain "cognitive vitality" to ward off depression? When researchers from the Netherlands assessed 830 subjects aged 49 to 81 years, they found that an "engaged and active lifestyle" does the trick.

At a three-year follow up, participants who engaged in mental, social and physical activities were least likely to endure cognitive decline, which is often accompanied by depression (*Z Gerontol Geriatr* 2002;35:575-81).



Reduce Stress

Stress is depression's evil twin: The two go hand-in-hand. Stress ups the production of the hormone cortisol, which can elevate to high levels and lead to a range of health problems. Often when stress abates, depression may follow suit.

Out of all stress-causing factors, work-related anxiety may be most likely to cause depression. Over a two-year period, researchers examined the association between stress and depression, using a health survey from respondents aged 18 to 75. Stress on the job was strongly linked to depression, and different work-stress factors affected men and women differently.

For women, high levels of general day-to-day stress and low levels of co-worker support were associated with higher odds of depression. And for men, consistent high job strain and anxiety elevated odds of incident depression (*Health Rep* 2006;17:11-29).

What causes you the most stress? Make a list of the top five most stressful things in your life right now and write down concrete steps and creative solutions to make them less anxiety producing.

Consider Therapy

A solid body of research indicates that therapy is as — or more — effective than medication for depression. It also offers longer-lasting results.

Cognitive therapy guides individuals to identify thoughts that produce negative emotions. Singling out negative self talk and replacing it with gentler and more accurate ideas improves self image and decreases the blues.

If you're interested in giving therapy a try, ask us for a referral to a qualified therapist in the community.

Lean on Friends and Family

Seeking comfort and advice from close friends and family may reduce depression. But did you know that being a good listener can reduce the blues as well?

Research shows that social support reduces depressive symptoms for both individuals receiving *and* providing support.

One large-scale study included 4,558 middle-aged individuals from a community in Northern Japan with a high rate of suicides. Providing and seeking support from anyone in the community strongly reduced incidence of depression and suicide, especially for male participants (*Psychiatry Clin Neurosci* 2006;60:652-61).

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