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Depression

Did you know around one million Australian adults and 100,000 young people live with depression each year? It is a leading health problem throughout the world with many different causes. The treatment of depression needs a multi-faceted approach for long term success.

Dietary Modification for depression. Firstly, check for food allergies or intolerances. Some research has shown that food allergies can trigger mental symptoms, including depression. People with depression who do not respond to other natural or conventional approaches should investigate the possibility of food sensitivities and avoid offending foods. The most common food allergies or intolerances are dairy, wheat, yeast, preservatives, colours, chocolate, peanuts. Some people with allergies or food intolerances show no physical

symptoms but can have emotional and mental changes after eating the offending food.

Tendencies to blood sugar imbalances can be an aggravating cause of depression. Often people who are depressed crave sugar and caffeine as both give an instant 'pick up'. But the underlying cause of imbalances in blood sugar and hormonal imbalances (insulin insensitivity) needs to be corrected.

This is especially important for people with major depression and long term depression as these people may be suffering from a syndrome called 'metabolic syndrome' which has other major health problems associated (including heart disease, reproductive problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, high triglycerides and low HDL 'good' cholesterol and a tendency to an unhealthy 'beer gut'. i.e. carry-

ing weight around the waist).

The most important factor in balancing blood sugar is to eat a diet with low GI carbohydrates with adequate protein at every meal and snack and good fats (see over for more details on the 'wellness food pyramid' to help balance blood sugar and reduce insulin levels).

Low fat diets can aggravate if not cause depression in some people. The amount and type of dietary fat consumed may influence the incidence of depression. Previous studies have found that diet regimens designed to lower cholesterol levels may heighten the incidence of depression. Does low cholesterol cause depression? It appears not, since studies have shown no adverse effect on mood in people taking cholesterol-lowering drugs.

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Depression Diet & Lifestyle

The connection more likely has to do with the *balance* of fats in the diet. Diets to lower blood cholesterol usually focus on restricting total fat intake while increasing the intake of unsaturated fats. These oils are very high in omega-6 fatty acids, but the recommended diets otherwise lack important omega-3 fatty acids (EPA/DHA). A high intake of omega-6 fatty acids relative to omega-3 fatty acids and an inadequate intake of omega-3 fatty acids (e.g., from fish and fish oil supplements) have been associated with increased levels of depression. People who eat diets high in omega-3 fatty acids from fish have a lower incidence of depression and suicide.

Exercise increases the body's production of endorphins—chemical substances that can relieve depression. Scientific research shows that routine

exercise can positively affect mood and help with depression. As little as three hours per week of aerobic exercise can profoundly reduce the level of depression. Yoga and meditation has also been shown to improve depression.

Self prescribing supplements for depression is not advisable. It is best to consult your qualified practitioner as there are different types of depression which require different types of supplements and dosage. This is especially true for herbal medicines. There are many factors to consider in the treatment of depression including your level of general 'toxicity' especially bowel toxicity and a need for a detoxification can be of primary importance; food allergies need to be checked; your stress levels; if you are more 'stressed than depressed' then you will require supplement to improve your

stress tolerances as well as the depression; and imbalances in adrenal gland function .



Certain foods containing omega 3 oils do NOT convert to the important EPA & DHA which are helpful in depression (and other health problems). The best source of EPA/DHA is cold water fish, and then to a lesser amount in omega 3 enriched eggs and grain fed red meat (not flax seed)

Supplements and Herbal Medicine for depression

The most commonly prescribed supplements for depression are;

Vitamin B complex supplement a good quality B supplement contain all the B group vitamins.

Check your iron level as anemia (even subclinical anemia i.e. on the lower side of 'normal' on a blood test) can cause depression. (see newsletter on WHY am I so Tired part 2)

Acetyl-L-Carnitine 2 gms twice a day; has been showed to improve fatigue (both mental and physical fatigue) which is common in many people with depression. It is reported in double-blind controlled studies to have beneficial effects in major depressive disorders and alzheimer's disease.

Magnesium helps reduce anxiety and fatigue (see Nov 2005 newsletter)

Fish oils (note: I only recommend Metagenics Meta EPA/DHA fish oils as other brands do not test for contaminants to the level I consider adequate and the absorption of this fish oil supplement is 50% compared to 30% of most other brands). Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil particularly DHA, are required for normal nervous system function. Depressed people have been reported to have lower omega-3 fatty acid levels (e.g., DHA) than people who are not depressed.

Herbal Supplements

St John's wort is probably the best studied herbal medicine for depression but remember there are many people who can NOT take St John's wort as it interferes with many medications (including the oral contraceptive pill). Studies have shown it to be as effective as certain anti-depressant medication in the treatment of mild to moderate depression. The traditional use of St John's wort is for menopausal women with depression. Use Mediherb brand.

There are a number of other herbs that have traditionally been used to treat depression; which herb to take depends on the individual but some of the common ones are;

Nervine 'tonic' herbs have been traditional used to 'tone and strengthen the nervous system are; st john wort, vervain, oats, skullcap, damiana, lemon balm.

Anxiety associated with depression include Kava, Valerian and Passionflower.

Low vitality from adrenal gland exhaustion often require an adrenal 'tonic' herb such as Withania, Licorice (not in high blood pressure), Rhemannia, Siberian ginseng.

Herbs to improve concentration and memory include Rhodiola is the main herb, also Gingko and Bacopa.

A holistic approach to depression considers many factors including the type of depression, food allergies, general 'toxicity' levels, stress levels, adrenal gland function and other. No one supplement or herb will work in every person with depression.



These are some of the commonly used supplements but not every one with depression will need them nor will it be a complete treatment.

Fish Oils improve your concentration, memory and depression

Did you see the recent media reports of a medical study using fish oil for children with learning and concentration problems? It has sparked an interest in should we be supplementing our children's diet with fish oil?

The simple answer is yes! Not only children with learning problems, ADD, ADHD, autism etc. But almost ALL children and adults should be taking a good quality fish oil supplement.

A recent report published by the Mental Health Foundation. Entitled Feeding Minds the report says that changes to diets over the last 50 years may be playing a key role in the rise of mental illness, including depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Alzheimer's disease and memory problems.

With regard to fatty acids, researchers

drew attention to the proliferation of industrialised farming methods, which have introduced pesticides into the food chain and altered the body fat composition of animals due to the diet they are now fed. For example, chickens now reach their slaughter weight twice as fast as they did 30 years ago, increasing their fat content from 2% to 22%. The diet they are given has also altered the balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids in chickens, the fats which we know the brain needs to ensure it functions properly.

Supplementing with the omega-3 fatty acids found in [fish oil appears to be a safe and effective treatment for childhood depression](#)

Some studies are now indicating that up to 95% of the population are low in EPA/DHA (which comes from fish oil).

EPA/DHA are the components in fish oil that have the many health benefits ranging from improving brain function, improving depression, protective from cardiovascular disease and many others.

EPA/DHA can be found in cold water oily fish, omega 3 enriched eggs and grain fed red meat.

In the past our diet contained up to 20 times more of these good oils than they do today. The ideal ration of omega 3 (ie fish oil) to omega 6 (from other oils and nuts etc) is 1:1. Our current diet is now is around 1:20. This makes it extremely difficult to obtain this vital nutrient in the correct amounts from our foods.

Simply TAKE your fish oils everyday adults AND children

Vegetarians take note; Some Bad News on Flax seed oil

Many vegetarians use flax seed oil as a replacement for fish oils. Flax seed oil contains omega 3 and hence it was assumed that these oils converted to the EPA/DHA in our bodies.

Recent research now shows that Flax seed oil does NOT convert to the all important DHA and to only small amounts to EPA. DHA is the important

part of fish oils vital for pregnant mother's growing babies brain development and children's brain development. It is the component in fish oils responsible for improving concentration and learning in children in the study above.

So my advise to all vegetarians is go semi-'vego' when you are pregnant and breastfeeding and take some good quality fish oils.

A study of breastfeeding mothers showed NO increase in the DHA levels of breast milk after taking flax seed oil. DHA is the component in fish oil for healthy brain development of the baby.

Improve your sex life and energy

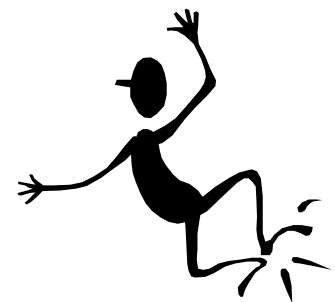
Three supplements have come under focus for their role is age related health problems and fatigue. They are [Lipoic acid](#), [Co Q10](#) and [Acetyl-L Carnitine](#).

These supplements play a role in the cells production of energy. I often prescribe one or all three to client's with fatigue which can be a common symptom of depression (especially when all other basic nutrient levels have been corrected the most common deficiencies in fatigue are magnesium and iron). These three supplements are useful in [tiredness/fatigue from general stress](#), chronic fatigue syndrome and

post viral syndrome.

Acetyl-L-Carnitine has also been shown to improve the aging male's sex life and mood (without increasing hormonal levels) by improving erectile function, orgasm and sexual general well-being. It was found to be more effective than taking testosterone and carnitine does NOT cause prostate enlargement.

[Lipoic acid is a powerful antioxidant and helps insulin insensitivity. Co Q 10 requires adequate dosage \(many supplements are too low\) to be effective.](#)



Acetyl -L-Carnitine helps to improve fatigue and tiredness, improves depression, protect against muscle loss, improve muscle mass and improves the aging male's sex life.

The two main types of depression are;

hyper or overactive types called 'melancholic/anxious depression' and the

hypo or under-active types 'apathetic or atypical depression'.

The melancholic/anxious depression are anxious and hyper aroused, with an 'over active' adrenal gland producing too high a level of a 'stress hormone'. They have a tendency to developing allergies, lower immunity to infections and in women an increase in estrogen sensitivity (i.e. worse PMS and other menstrual problems). With any of the following symptoms with constant nervousness ('jitters'), insomnia, hyperactivity, fatigue, feelings of low self-esteem, inability to concentrate, low sex drive, poor appetite.

Whereas the atypical/apathetic depression is often the depleted and apathetic types with low levels of 'stress' hormones (cortisol) and often associated with adrenal gland exhaustion (they simply cannot respond to a stressor). They tend to have prolonged and persistent depressed mood with any of the following symptoms; increased appetite, weight gain, excessive sleeping, fatigue, apathy, low self-esteem, low sex drive, inability to concentrate or recurrent suicidal compulsion

To Stay Well and Balanced most people need to take three different supplements a day; a good quality fish oil, a multi vitamin/mineral supplement and an antioxidant supplement.



Wellness Food Pyramid

We have all seen the 'food pyramid containing the 5 food groups. This pyramid has high GI grains as the bases for a 'good' diet. The food pyramid below I believe to be a more updated and healthier approach to a healthy diet.

