



Dealing with depression

Conventional and alternative treatments

By Thomas Wood

Depression is the common cold of mental health issues. Millions of Americans have it. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), in 2017, 7.1% of Americans had a depressive episode. That's 17.3 million people—a lot of us. People 18 to 25 had the highest rate at 13.1%, while those over 50 had the lowest rate at 4.7%.

Depressive symptoms occur on their own or as a part of other situations. If you just had a baby, have a serious or long-standing medical problem or suffer from a thought disorder, you may get depressive symptoms as a not so welcome bonus.

Types of depression

We can break depression down into three basic categories:

- **Adjustment disorder** - depression when life happens. We lose a job, a relationship ends, we get divorced or we get sick—any of these can throw us for a loop. But even positive changes, like starting a job or new school, getting married or relocating, can bring about depression. Adjustment disorder tends to be mild and often heals up on its own as we adjust to the change.
- **Major depression** - a more severe depression. This is the kind of depression often portrayed in movies and television shows,

when a person has trouble eating and sleeping and may find it difficult to work or even get out of bed. Often this has a seasonal component, appearing or worsening during the winter months, when there isn't a lot of daylight.

- **Dysthymic disorder** - a long-term, low-grade depression. People with dysthymia may look like they are doing OK, but inside they feel like they are dying, because life has no pleasure and joy. Dysthymia slows a person down, like wading through a swimming pool—you get to where you want to go, but it takes a lot more effort than if you were walking on dry land.

Conventional treatments

There are well-known conventional treatments available for depression, such as medications that change the levels of serotonin and dopamine circulating in our brains. These medications have improved a lot over the years, and they can be highly effective for many people with relatively few side effects, or at least fewer than older medicines had.

You may have considered medicines, or you may even have tried them. Possibly the side effects are not acceptable, or you just don't like to take pills. What then?

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"Sometimes a fresh perspective from a well-trained professional is the jump-start we need on our own personal path to happiness and joy."

Improving your mood without drugs

Let's talk about options.

Full spectrum light. This is therapy using lightbulbs that have all of the spectrum of daylight. Previously one needed a special light box for this treatment. Now it is a lot easier and less expensive. Just go to the hardware store and look for lightbulbs with full spectrum of any wattage. It is cheap and effective—a great combination.

In your search for bulbs, watch the K (Kelvin) number, which tells how yellow or white/blue the light is. Soft yellow, the kind of light we enjoy in our living rooms, is 2700K. It is pleasing to the eye, but not what we are looking for. We want 6500K bulbs. They emit light that is bright white or blue. It looks harsh, but it is a source of daylight wherever we are. Mixing in some soft yellow lights (2700K) with full spectrum bulbs gives the room a more pleasing ambiance without losing the benefits of full spectrum light.

Vitamin D3. There is some evidence that vitamin D3 has an antidepressant effect. Our bodies produce D3 when our skin is exposed to sunlight, so we may not get enough in wintertime when there is less sunlight and more time spent indoors. Taking a D3 supplement might help make up for this vitamin deficiency and improve our moods.

Cognitive and behavioral changes. We have a lot of evidence that changing how we think and what we do helps. "*Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Made Simple*" by Seth Gillihan can be a good resource for some. Sheer positivity also can help, and there are books for that too: "*Positive Imaging*" by Norman Vincent Peale, "*You Can Heal Your Life*" by Louise Hay, and "*The Dynamic Laws of Prosperity*" by Catherine Ponder.

If all of this seems too much for you, it may be time to see a therapist. Sometimes a fresh perspective from a well-trained professional is the jump-start we need on our own personal path to happiness and joy. The answers are out there, and often we find that the answers are within. ■

This article provides a general overview of certain mental health issues. It is not medical advice. You should consult your mental health provider for a detailed assessment of your own symptoms and circumstances before embarking on any treatment for a mental health issue.



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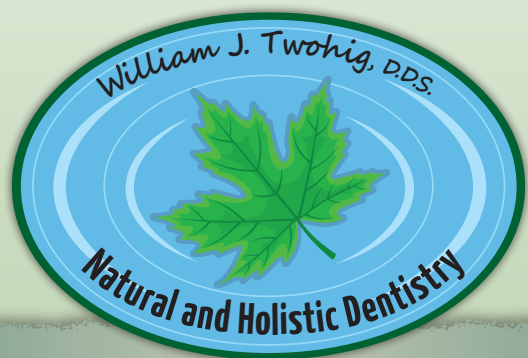
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