



Natural Treatments for **YOUTH WITH DEPRESSION**

By Kerry Doolan,

Depression affects one in seven people throughout their lifetime and has a myriad of potential causes relating to physiological, psychological, social and environmental factors. Victims may feel like there is no help available and that medication (with its own list of side effects) is the only way. Medication is not the answer but a temporary cover for symptoms that need to be addressed by looking inwards.

Solving the puzzle: The myriad underlying the causes of youth depression and how to treat them. Is depression a symptom of a crisis in the understanding of life's purpose? Or the result of an irretrievable loss? Perhaps the unique contribution of the individual has not yet been found? Is depression sometimes a symptom of a stage between a secure past that gave a sense of purpose and the next step? Perhaps depression is caused by apprehension regarding the seemingly daunting challenges of preparing for an unknowable and uncertain future? Could the next step bring to volition a much greater contribution? Can depression be due to inaccurate perceptions? Or sometimes simple things like a hormonal imbalance? Or perhaps: "Depression is anger you feel you do not have a right to. Manifests as hopelessness." – Louise L. Hay

This is by no means a complete list, but the symptoms of depression are apparent: downbeat, hangdog, bent over posture; persistent sad, anxious, or 'empty' moods; feelings of hopelessness or pessimism, of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness; loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyable, including sex; decreased energy, fatigue – feeling slow; difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions; trouble sleeping, early morning awakening, or oversleeping; restlessness or irritability; persistent physical symptoms, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain that do not respond to routine treatment; changes in appetite and/or weight; thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts. "An Australian Bureau of Statistics report shows that suicide has overtaken car accidents as the leading cause of death for young Australians." Serious, thought provoking, what is the solution?

Is medication the answer? "I am alarmed at the monster that Johns Hopkins neuroscientist Solomon Snyder and I created when we discovered the simple binding assay for drug receptors 25 years ago. Prozac and other antidepressant serotonin-receptor-active compounds may also cause cardiovascular problems in some susceptible people after long-term use, which has become common practice despite the lack of safety studies.

"The public is being misinformed about the precision of these selective serotonin-uptake inhibitors when the medical profession oversimplifies their action in the brain and ignores the body as if it exists merely to carry the head around! In short, these molecules of emotion regulate every aspect of our physiology. A new paradigm has evolved, with implications that life-style changes such as diet and exercise can offer profound, safe and natural mood elevation." – Dr. Candace B. Pert (Letter to the Editor of TIME Magazine, October 20, 1997, p.8.)

Millions suffer from depressive disorders, yet only 23 percent of individuals with clinical depression seek treatment. Of these, only 10 percent receive adequate care. Meditation has verifiable, scientific research based evidence of its efficacy in dispatching the old modes of TREATING YOUTH WITH DEPRESSION negative thoughts and emotions and replacing them with new positive, empowering modes. At the very least, the act of meditating will allow one to consider the depressing thoughts and emotions at a time and place of choice. At the very best, meditation will evoke the production by our bodies of 'feel good' neurochemicals like serotonin, dopamine, endorphins and health boosting hormones like DHEA (DeHydroEpiAndrosterone) that are promoting of long-term health, happiness, joy, and often, bliss.



Many emotional issues, including anxiety and depression, result from the autonomic nervous system being out of balance. Breathing is a major element of the autonomic nervous system and a key to consciously controlling it. Breathing as a function of the autonomic nervous system, is an action we do not need to consciously control but may do, if we so choose. In like manner, the other functions of the autonomic nervous system may also be consciously controlled, just as an athlete may consciously retrain their breathing, rhythm, depth and intensity and eventually, through practice, that trained breathing becomes the new default mode of the autonomic nervous system. The learned new way of breathing becomes automatic, autonomous, a new program overwriting the old unconscious pattern. Thus may one also train the other autonomic nervous system functions to achieve a balance between the stress induced fright, fight or flight response (FFR) of the sympathetic nervous system and the rest, repair and relaxation response (RRR) of the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system.

Meditation will help bring to awareness depressing thoughts and feelings before they would otherwise break through into your consciousness. When these thoughts break out of the subconscious mind it's after they've been stewing in the unconscious mind for some time, perhaps years and decades, and that is when they're most dangerous. Many people unconsciously feel their life is meaningless, an attitude that may have been inculcated at such a tender age that there is no conscious memory or recognition of it, in fact it is often denied, yet meaning is still sought for, yearned for. The inner strength and insights gained through meditation practices is a proven and effective antidote to depression. Through the knowledge of meditation's many styles and forms, one learns it can be used at any time in any place.

Exercise has been claimed to be so effective it could be 'the new drug' for depression that almost anyone can take advantage of. In one study, adults aged 20 to 45 years, who were diagnosed with mild to moderate depression, used exercise alone to treat the condition and found: Depressive symptoms were cut almost in half in those individuals who participated in 30 minute aerobic exercise sessions, three to five times a week after 12 weeks.

Those who exercised with low intensity for three and five days a week showed a 30 percent reduction in symptoms. Participants who did stretching flexibility exercises 15 to 20 minutes three days a week averaged a 29 percent decline.

The results of this study are similar to that of other studies, which involved patients with mild or moderate depression being treated with antidepressants or cognitive therapy – proving patients need not rely on drugs to treat depression.

Medical Meditation is a scientifically researched method of treating depression. Movement meditations can combine the best of both exercise and meditation, for example: Dance genres like Gabrielle Roth's '5 Rhythms' are powerful, uplifting methods of movement meditation generating those feel good agents of pleasure from within and it's fun. Dance is a great movement meditation, dancing alone or, in groups.

If dance is not suitable, a walking meditation may be better. Simply focus on one thing, like breathing or, each footfall or, combine walking with a Mantra style of meditation or, Zen or, Mindfulness Meditation or, Chakra Meditation. Many styles will work, alone, or in a combination of alternating styles to suit the activity.

Mantra meditations are effective in displacing depressing negative thought streams, use a traditional mantra like Om Shanti meaning "peace be with you" or the Hare Krishna mantra (which predates the modern sect known by its name by many centuries) with meaning of this mantra being "Joy Love Joy Love, Love Love, Joy Joy, Joy Bliss Joy Bliss, Bliss Bliss, Joy Joy". Or use a prayer, a positive poem or, a line from an uplifting song. Positive affirmations like 'I am fortunate, blessed, happy I am' may also be used as a mantra. Put it to a beat or familiar tune and repeat often.

Positive affirmations are useful in a walking meditation to reprogram the unconscious mind overwriting the habitual tendencies and replacing that with empowering, uplifting experiences.

"Affirmations are the virus removal tool of the mind" – Isabelle Cunningham. Affirmations work to replace the old thought patterns through constant repetition and remembrance.

Considering depression, the myriad of causes, their origin often being completely obscured by time and the forgotten causal incidents, it may be more fruitful to look for solutions for depression rather than to seek to solve the puzzle of it. Tools to use: Exercise, Yoga, Meditation, Affirmations.

Affirmations to alleviate depression: *"I am beyond fears and limitations". "I create my life."* – Louise L. Hay *"I am fortunate, blessed, happy I am."* – Kerry Doolan

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