

Treatment options other than medicines for depression

Many people believe depression is a result of a chemical imbalance and therefore requires the use of chemicals to treat. However, studies have suggested that depression results from how people perceive past, present, or possible future events. When people perceive an event as sad, a chemical reaction occurs that encourages the person to feel more sad and have an increased number of sad thoughts which can lead to depression if they continue. This chemical reaction is not only in the brain, but in the body too, resulting in the physical symptoms of depression such as decreased appetite and fatigue.

People who suffer from debilitating depression may benefit from medication to blunt this chemical reaction. However, there is a lot of research that shows people do well with learning to recognize and change the thought processes and resulting behaviors that lead to depression and perpetuate it. This is called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy. These skills can be learned from books, audiotapes, certain counselors, and in workshops or retreats.

In addition to learning to treat depression therapy can reduce suffering from pain and improve:

- job performance
- listening skills
- memory
- decision making skills
- relationships such as marriage
- public speaking skills
- concentration

Resources

Online

- National Institute of Mental Health
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/complete-index.shtml>
- National Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
<http://www.nacbt.org/whatiscbt.htm>

Books

- *The Feeling Good Handbook* by David Burns. This is a classic text that is well written and addresses common psychological experiences such as anxiety, stress, depression, procrastination, and difficulty in relationships.
- *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh. This Zen master describes Buddhist psychology to teach mindfulness and CBT. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King Jr, for his work during the Vietnam War.

Workshops and retreats local to Vermont

- Exquisite Mind <http://www.exquisitemind.com> (audio tapes available at web site)
- Vermont Center for Cognitive Behavior Therapy – (802) 651-8999
- University of Massachusetts - <http://www.umassmed.edu/cfm/>

There are many different medicines for treating depression. The government has created a guide to help you learn about your medicines. The guide talks about symptoms of depression, medicines used to treat depression, and common side effects. The information in the guide comes from a review of 293 research reports. People with depression helped the government write the guide.

A few important reminders about medicines for depression:

1. Six out of 10 people will feel better with the first medicine they try. The rest of the people will need to try other medicines before they find the one that is right for them. Most people can find one that makes them feel better.
2. It may take several weeks of taking medicine before you feel better. However if your symptoms do not get better or if you feel worse, call your primary care provider right away.
3. Most people taking medicines have at least one side effect. The most common side effects are constipation, daytime sleepiness, diarrhea, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, nausea, sexual problems, shakiness, trouble sleeping, and weight gain.
4. Never stop your medicine without talking to your primary care provider first. Stopping your medicine too quickly can sometimes make you feel very sick.
5. Tell your primary care provider if you are taking herbal supplements such as St. John's Wort. Sometimes these supplements interact with your prescription medicines.
6. Always ask your primary care provider or pharmacist if you have questions.

Here is how you can get a free copy of the medicine guide:

From the Internet:

<http://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/repFiles/AntidepressantsConsumerGuide.pdf>

By telephone (Ask for AHRQ Publication Number 07-EHC007-2A)
(800) 358-9295

By mail (Make sure to ask for AHRQ Publication Number 07-EHC007-2A)
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