

Depression Is Usually Not a “Chemical Imbalance”

What Is Depression?

The word ‘depression’ is commonly used to describe feelings or experiences that are not true depression. For example, someone may say “I’m depressed” when experiencing sadness or disappointment, which are different from depression.

Depression includes at least five of the following symptoms for a period of at least two weeks:

- Loss of pleasure in normally pleasurable activities, or decrease in sex drive
- Poor appetite with weight loss, or overeating with weight gain
- Insomnia, or sleeping more than usual
- Loss of energy and feelings of fatigue
- Low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness
- Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
- Feelings of hopelessness or guilt
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide

Is All Depression the Same?

Not all depression is the same. **Reactive** depression is a response to an external situation, such as an difficult relationship or financial problems. **Endogenous** depression is not caused by an obvious external event or situation, but by some internal problem.

Reactive depression often improves with counseling or with the passage of time, which can lead to positive external changes that result in improved mood. In contrast, endogenous depression will not improve until the cause of the internal problem is pinpointed and changed. Both types may be present simultaneously.

Look for Underlying Illness

Endogenous depression may be a symptom of an underlying illness. If there is no obvious external reason for depression, it is important to get a medical evaluation to find out whether there is some underlying physical cause of the depression.

Common Causes of Endogenous Depression

Some of the more common underlying physical reasons for endogenous depression include:

- Low thyroid function (hypothyroidism)
- Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)
- Adrenal dysfunction from excess stress

- Intestinal overgrowth of candida, a yeast that resides in some people's intestines
- Food intolerances or sensitivities
- Environmental allergies or toxins
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Impaired detoxification by the liver
- Chronic microbial infection (e.g., viral, bacterial, fungal, or protozoal)
- Hormone deficiency or excess
- Biochemical problems

Drugs Can Cause Depression

Prescription and social drugs are a frequent cause of endogenous depression. Some of the most common drug causes of endogenous depression include:

- Oral contraceptives and other sources of exogenous (foreign) estrogens
- Steroids (e.g., Prednisone)
- Blood pressure-lowering drugs (e.g., beta blockers)
- Caffeine
- Alcohol
- Nicotine

Clues About the Causes of Endogenous Depression

Not all endogenous depression is the same. Each person with depression has a unique combination of symptoms, which occur because of a singular combination of predisposing and triggering factors. Whereas conventional medicine uses "depression" by itself as a label, it is more useful to look deeper, for the identifying features of an individual's depression. Once recognized, the identifying features point to the probable underlying causes. This is a key step in dealing with depression, because it is only by addressing the underlying causes that depression can be cured.

Listed below are some underlying causes of depression, and their identifying features.

Low testosterone in men:

- Usually mild depression
- Fatigue
- Lack of motivation
- Low self-confidence
- Erectile dysfunction

Low estrogen or high progesterone-to-estrogen ratio in women:

- Depression
- Fatigue

High estrogen in women:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Irritability

Low blood sugar:

- Depression
- Irritability
- Inability to concentrate
- Lightheadedness
- Low energy

Food sensitivities or intolerances:

- Depression that improves with not eating
- Depression and sluggishness after eating

Deficiencies of vitamin B6 and magnesium:

- Depression that is worse before menstruation

Airborne allergies (such as to pollens):

- Depression that is seasonal
- Watery, red, itchy eyes
- Sneezing
- Runny or stuffed up nose

Excess melatonin production due to low daytime light conditions in winter:

- Depression that comes on in the late fall/winter and improves in the spring
- Note: melatonin supplementation is NOT recommended as a treatment

Omega three fatty acid deficiency:

- Depression
- Dry and/or itchy skin
- Dandruff
- Fatigue

Serotonin problem:

- Depression
- Insomnia

Important note: the serotonin pathway in the brain is dependent on good nutritional status. The serotonin pathway requires:

- Vitamin C*
- Magnesium*
- Folic acid
- Vitamin B12

- The active form of vitamin B6 (P-5-P, which some people have trouble making)
- Omega three fatty acids

*Depleted by stress.

Endogenous Depression Is Often Curable

Depending on the person, endogenous depression may be curable. Cure is possible, however, only when the underlying causes are identified and removed. To do this means looking at the whole person.

Keep in mind that depression is not an antidepressant deficiency!

What to Do?

There are many approaches to the treatment of endogenous depression. The goal of treatment will differ, depending on the approach. The appropriate treatment depends on the person’s goal and belief system.

Overall Goal of Treatment

<u>Treatment</u>	<u>Suppress</u>	<u>Palliate</u>	<u>Cure</u>
Acupuncture			x
Antidepressant drugs	x		
Herbal medicines		x	
Homeopathy			x
Exercise therapy		x	
Nutritional therapy		x	x

Acupuncture

- Acupuncture is a wholistic system of medicine that treats the whole person. It is a deep-acting treatment that can cure depression.

Antidepressants

- Antidepressants are prescribed on the theory that “biochemical imbalance” is the cause of depression. Antidepressants artificially raise the level of neurotransmitters in the central nervous system. They probably seem to “work” because they alter the brain chemistry and cover up the symptoms.

Examples: Effexor, Paxil, Prozac, Wellbutrin, Zoloft

Herbal Medicine

- Herbal medicine is gentler than drug therapy, however it will not cure depression; it can only palliate it.

Examples: Black cohosh, St. John's Wort

Important note: Many herbs have the potential for undesirable interactions with drugs and may produce "side effects" (the secondary actions), so they should be used with an understanding of and respect for these possibilities.

Homeopathy

- Homeopathy is a very deep-acting treatment that has cured thousands of people of depression. There are hundreds of homeopathic medicines that can cure depression. The correct medicine is chosen based on the individual's unique expression of depression.

Examples: A person who has depression that is worse from consolation, is quite reserved, feels unable to release their emotions, has headaches, and craves salt needs a different homeopathic medicine from someone who has depression that is better from consolation, craves company and reassurance, cries easily, desires rich foods, and feels better walking in the fresh air.

Exercise Therapy

- Move your body around! Research has demonstrated that physical activity is as effective as antidepressants, without the risks or "side effects." Anyone with depression who is physically capable of exercising would do well to try it before trying any invasive treatments. The most effective physical activity is aerobic, meaning it is vigorous enough to get the heart rate elevated.

Nutritional Therapy

- This might include diet changes and/or supplements. In my opinion, nutritional deficiency is the most common cause of endogenous depression. It is well worth pursuing this approach before trying other, especially riskier, treatments.

Seven Steps to An Awake and Happy Brain

- 1. See a licensed health practitioner who is qualified to detect any underlying physical reasons for depression, for a thorough evaluation.**
 - Take appropriate steps to address any causes that are identified.
 - It is important to be aware that neurotransmitter imbalance is only one of *many* possible causes of depression. Even if it is a problem, it is important to look for the *cause* of the imbalance and to attempt to remove it, not just treat the symptoms.
- 2. Nourish yourself with healthy food and supplements.**
 - Eat nutrient-dense foods that support health of the mind and protect against depression.
 - Use appropriate supplementation, under the guidance of a licensed health practitioner who is trained in nutrition.
- 3. Rejuvenate with adequate rest, relaxation, and loving relationships.**
 - Take relaxation breaks during the day, and allow enough time for sleeping.
 - Cultivate relationships with people who love and accept you.
- 4. Find meaning, purpose, and pleasure.**
 - Stay interested and involved. Have things to look forward to and that bring a sense of meaning.
 - Find out what brings you happiness and inner peace and focus on those, rather than on what you or others think you *should* do.
 - Enjoy positive social interactions, activities that bring feelings of usefulness and competence, and activities that are intrinsically pleasant.
- 5. Control negative interpretations of situations and of yourself.**
 - Refrain from negative, distorted, and irrational thinking.
 - Keep your thinking realistic and positive.
- 6. Be accepting and respectful of yourself.**
 - Learn self-acceptance and develop self-respect, through approaches such as

affirmations, meditation, assertiveness training, and regular exercise.

7. Keep your energy moving.

- Refrain from dwelling on problems and staying stuck in negative emotions.
- Place your attention on what you *can* do about difficult situations and on constructive ways of taking care of your needs and helping yourself to feel better.
- Identify viable options in difficult situations, to counter feelings of being trapped and helpless.
- Express negative emotions in constructive ways. Denying or repressing your feelings stresses the body and creates feelings of isolation and low self-worth.
- Keep your body moving. Stay active. Regular exercise reduces feelings of depression as effectively as antidepressants, without the risks or side effects.

