**Dealing with Depression Naturally**

By Dr. Ramona Warren

Over the past two decades there has been a significant increase in patients diagnosed with depression. The World Health Organization found depression to be the leading cause of disability worldwide, and the third most reported chronic health condition in the United States. It used to be people were very “hush hush” when someone in their family was suffering with depression. These days, we rarely raise an eyebrow because depression is so commonplace. Although we seem to shrug our shoulders at depression, the fact remains depression can significantly impact the quality of our lives.

Common symptoms of depression include fatigue, sleep disturbances such as insomnia or sleeping too much, anxiety, brain fog, feelings of worthlessness, weight changes (either increased or decreased) and decreased interest or pleasure in daily activities. People who are depressed frequently have more aches and pains in their body, and those in constant pain can become depressed. It is not uncommon for people with depression to experience suicidal thoughts.

The standard treatment for depression, as well as any other diagnosable mental disorder, is medication. Nearly 30 million people in America are currently on at least one psychiatric drug. Even These days it isn’t unusual to find children as young as two and three years old being prescribed antidepressant or anti-anxiety medication. The problem, however, is that many of these medications have lasting effects on the brain. Most medications cause a “numbing” effect so the individual won’t feel sad, but he also won’t feel other emotions such as pleasure or joy.

What’s more, common side effects of antidepressants include many of the same symptoms as depression including weight gain, suicidal thoughts, insomnia, nervousness, anxiety, fatigue and confusion (brain fog). Besides causing significant side effects, some question whether antidepressants even work. A 2010 study in the January issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found antidepressants were not any better than a placebo in reducing symptoms of depression.

Rather than mask symptoms with medication, it’s important to get to the root cause of depression. Depression is a multi-faceted problem and is often associated with our diet, our sleep, our lifestyle, stress, exercise habits, the foods we eat and the health of our gut. When people experience anxiety or depression, they don’t usually think about the connection between their food and the way they feel, but this is often where the problem with depression begins.

Additionally, there are many underlying conditions that can be associated with depression including low thyroid function, low adrenal function, hormonal imbalances, blood sugar imbalances, food sensitivities, insomnia, chronic stress and high cortisol levels. These conditions, as well as nutritional deficiencies, cause neurotransmitter imbalances.

Neurotransmitters are chemical messengers responsible for regulating communication between the brain and our organs, glands and muscles. They impact and regulate our emotions, our stress response, energy, cravings, pain and mental ability. If our neurotransmitters are imbalanced and not functioning properly, it can have a tremendous impact on our overall health. Often neurotransmitter imbalance is at the root cause of symptoms of depression and anxiety.

There are several neurotransmitters such as serotonin, GABA, dopamine, epinephrine, norepinephrine, and glutamate. Certain symptoms are often associated with imbalances of specific neurotransmitters or hormones. The good news is that imbalances can be easily identified through simple testing. Once you know a patient’s specific imbalance, you can correct it through diet, lifestyle and specific supplementation. Some of the common supplements used to help treat depression naturally include:

1. Folic Acid. This is a B vitamin and one of the most common nutritional deficiencies. Low levels are linked to depression and bipolar disorder.
2. Vitamin B6, which converts tryptophan, an amino acid, into serotonin. Women on birth control and people who are heavy users of alcohol often have a B6 deficiency.
3. Inositol, a B vitamin, is necessary for proper brain function since it impacts serotonin levels.
4. Magnesium deficiency is commonly seen in depression. Magnesium can help reduce panic attacks and our reaction to stress.
5. Vitamin D3 helps elevate our mood. People with the lowest levels of vitamin D3 are shown to be 11 times more prone to depression. Most Americans are deficient in vitamin D3. Get out in the sun about 30 minutes a day without sunscreen, but don’t allow yourself to burn. Your blood levels should be between 45 and 90 for optimal D3 levels.
6. Exercise. This is the silver bullet. Many studies show exercise is more effective in treating depression than antidepressants. Plus, exercise also has many other positive side effects including great stress relief.
7. Eat a quality low-carb Mediterranean diet. What we eat has such an impact on our emotional health. Chemical imbalances come from a lack of good nutrients. Our foods make up the chemicals in our body, especially our neurotransmitters.

There are many powerful ways to beat depression without taking antidepressants. We are not deficient in a medication, but most of us are deficient in nutrients and have poor lifestyle habits. Follow the above recommendations to improve your mood and your overall health.

If you would like more information on simple tests to determine your neurotransmitter and/or hormone levels please email me at pathwaysth@gmail.com