

Dealing with Depression Naturally

November 14th, 2013

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Dealing with Depression Naturally

What do we mean when we say “depression”?

How do we tell the difference between:

- * *clinical depression*
- * *Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)* and
- * natural slowdown of our bodies with the season?

Dealing with Depression Naturally



Dealing with Depression Naturally

- **Major Depressive Disorder (clinical depression)**
 - In the same 2 weeks, person has had 5 or more of the following nearly every day:
 - depressed mood
 - decreased interest or pleasure
 - eating & weight changes
 - sleep changes
 - Fatigue
 - psychomotor activity (speeding up or slowing down)
 - self-worth (feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt-may border on delusional)
 - Concentration (difficulty w/ decisions or concentration)
 - death (suicidality, repeated thoughts about death) ¹

Depression can be tricky...

- Not all people recognize or accurately describe how they feel
- People from different cultural backgrounds may not have a similar experience
- Symptoms differ greatly-some cry and slow down, some smile and say they're fine.
- Some people really don't feel depressed-they experience mainly a loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities

And the holiday season can be hard...

- Idealized expectations of ourselves versus what we are really able to do
- Asking ourselves: “what is best for me right now?” and “Who am I doing this for?” can help us find compassion for ourselves
 - Stress/sadness related to holidays can be financial, social, spiritual or related to isolation and loneliness.
 - Finding meaning without exhausting ourselves or bankrupting ourselves emotionally, physically, energetically as well as financially.

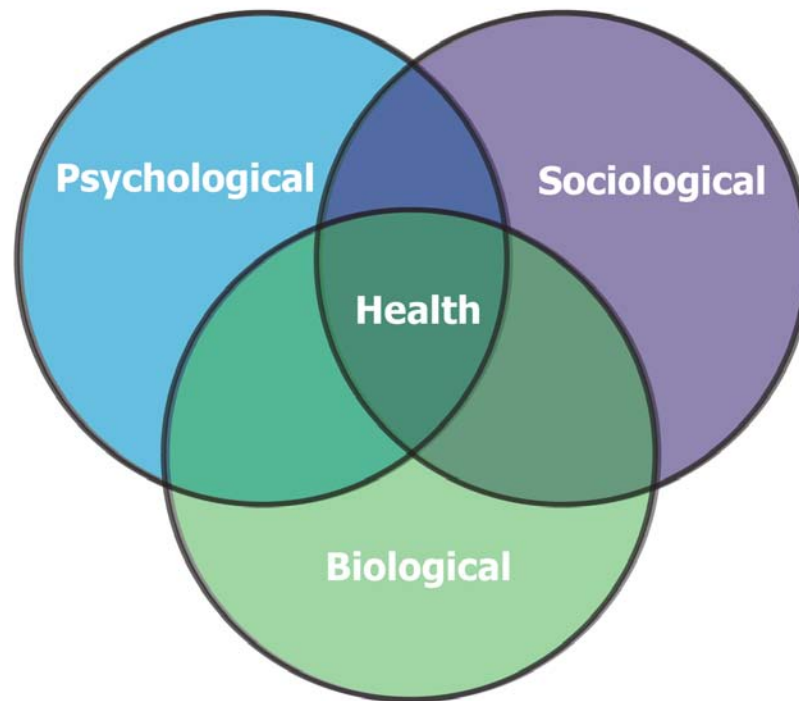
How do we know if it's the winter blues or something more serious?

- Time spent each day feeling sad or depressed
- Other activities impacted by fatigue
- Pleasurable activities no longer bring pleasure
- Symptoms seem linked to season-less sunlight, more hours of darkness-improve with light or sunny weather

How do we know if it's the winter blues or something more serious?

- Symptoms interfering with work, school, family life
- Coping strategies for symptoms become unhelpful
 - Food/alcohol/other substances
 - Distractors: internet, computer, TV
 - Excessive sleeping, stopping previously established exercise routines

The Biopsychosocial Model



* spiritual/ meaning-making component also important

Mind

- Depressed or sad thoughts can cause perseveration, insomnia, and hopelessness: “I won’t feel any better tomorrow.”
- Regret, or undue energy spent focused on the past, can keep us from our present.
- Sad thoughts or focus on feeling depressed can keep us stuck.

Body

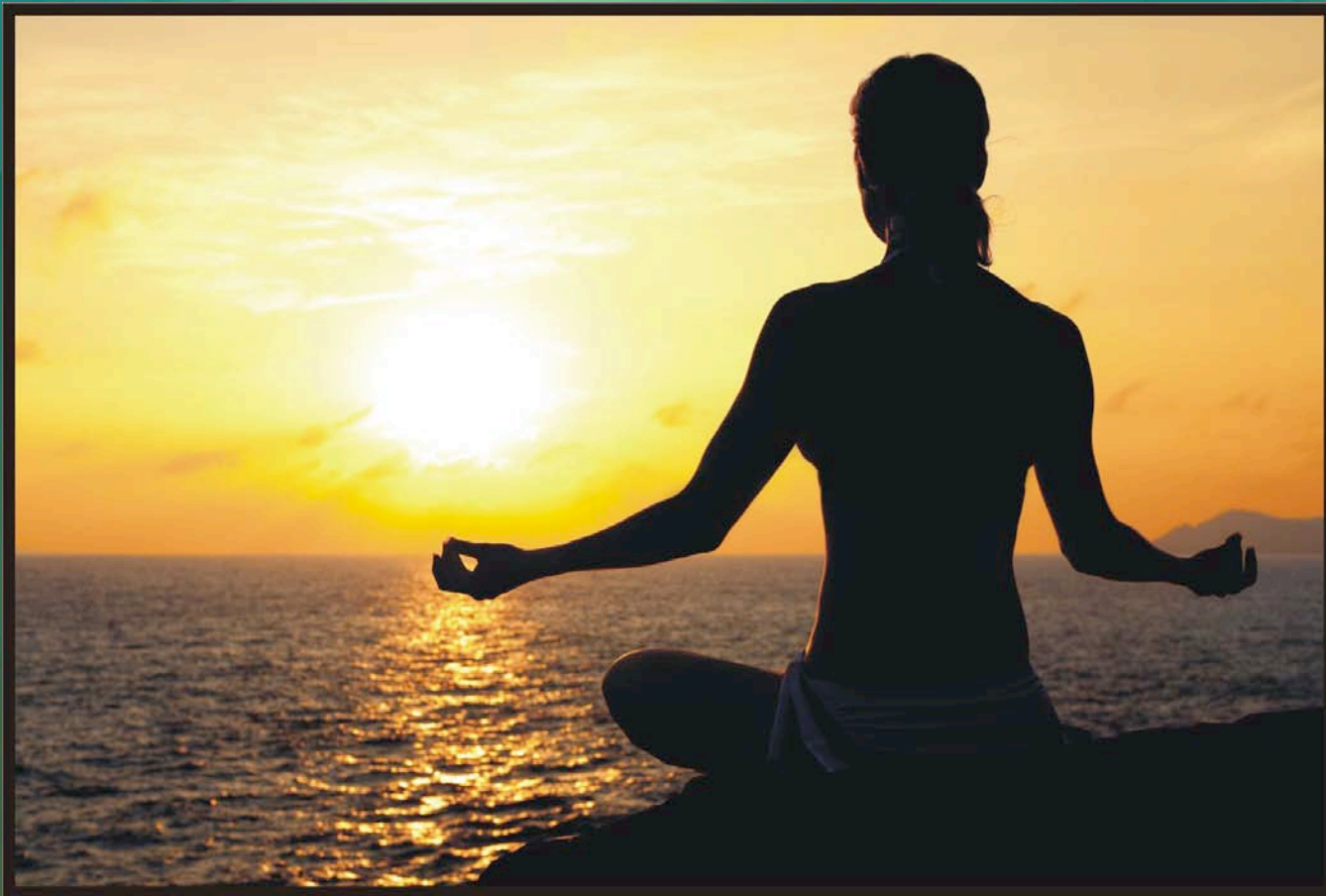
- Make sure you consult with your primary physician-fatigue and depression can be signs or symptoms of underlying health conditions
- Also make sure if you take medications for depression to consult thoroughly before changing or lowering your dosage yourself-many medications have side effects when you slow down or stop, including...increased depression.
- Avoid depressants such as alcohol

Spirit

- Sadness or depression may be an underlying message of something happening within the mind/body/spirit connection-our spirits have wisdom if we can investigate the messages.
- Existentially, sorrow or sadness can be a sign that we have stepped off of our authentic path or are not attending to parts of ourselves that are true or unvoiced.
- When we 'hear' what depression can have to tell us, often it will resolve.

Remember, the present...

- Is all we have.



Cortisol and you...

- Cortisol, the “stress hormone” produced by adrenals
- Normally, cortisol levels are high on waking, peak within 30-45 minutes, falls over the day, peak again in the afternoon, and falls slowly with lowest points in middle of the night.
- “flattened” cortisol cycles associated with chronic fatigue, insomnia, burnout.
- Chronic elevation of cortisol linked with immune suppression, physical illness, and mood disorders, including depression and anxiety.

Psychological Factors

- How do we feel about the range of our own emotions?
- Are we alright with our own sorrow, sadness?
- Are we okay with our increased need for sleep and carbohydrates during winter months?
- Are we over-extending ourselves in an effort to please others?
- Do we have meaning in our work, relationships, connections with something bigger than ourselves?
- Are we connected to our deepest values during the holiday season?

Social Factors

- Social support
- Cultural factors around depression: the happiness trap
- Cultural factors around over-work, and the prizing of not needing sleep/quiet time/work life balance
- Individual cultural factors: Age, race, gender, gender identity, language fluency, SES, sexual identity, ethnic group, disability status, spiritual or religious affiliation₂

Spirituality & Meaning-Making Factors

- “How is your spirit?” Leanna Standish, Ph.D., ND, LAc.3
- Isolation associated with poor health outcomes
- Religious faith can be a source of either stability, belonging and purpose
or
- Stress, tension, rejection, conflict

Intervention & Treatment: Biological

- Exercise
- Meditation/ t'ai qi/ qi gong
- Sleep hygiene
- Light therapy
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Supplements such as St. John's Wort, 5HTP
- Massage, acupuncture
- Pharmacotherapy



Intervention & Treatment: Psychological

- Counseling! \$20 per session at BCNH
- Sleep hygiene
- Exercise
- Client-centered, Mindfulness-based therapies (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy)
- Expressive arts: journaling, art, singing, dancing
- Gratitude journal/meditation
- Play therapy or art therapy for children & adolescents
- Setting realistic expectations for oneself
- Self-compassion
- Boundaries with others



Intervention & Treatment: Social

- Exercise with friends or family
- Relationship & social support
- Meaningful work (paid or unpaid)
- Importance of companion animals
- Importance of humor & joy



Intervention & Treatment: Spirit & Meaning-Making

- Connection with the numinous
 - Religion
 - Spiritual tradition
 - Ritual
 - Community
 - Nature
 - Existential issues



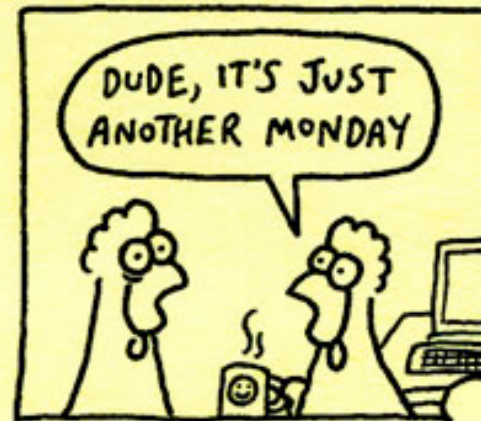
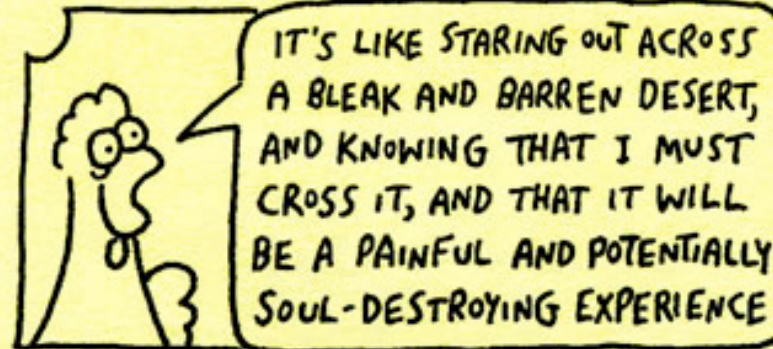
Remember...

- What is best for me right now?
- Who am I doing this for?
- Right now, I am doing the best I can.
- For today, I feel _____.
- Sadness (or fear or sorrow or depression) is here right now.

Remember, It's all about Perception

Savage Chickens

by Doug Savage



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www.savagechickens.com

References

1. American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
2. Taken from the ADDRESSING Model of Pam Hayes (2001).
3. Leanna Standish, comment in public presentation, Center for Spirituality, Science & Medicine, Bastyr University.
4. Savage Chickens cartoon by Doug Savage; retrieved from savagechickens.com