

Integrative Approaches to Depression

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Introduction

- While medication can be helpful for depression, there are several effective non-pharmacologic options, which can support treatment and in certain cases address the problem at the root and obviate the need for medication.
- The most strongly evidence-based integrative treatments for depression are exercise, light therapy, yoga, meditation, spiritual practice and certain supplements, such as turmeric, activated methylfolate and rhodiola.
- Note: do not make changes to your medications without consulting your doctor.

Exercise

- Studies have demonstrated that exercise is as effective as medication for mild to moderate depression.
- Aim for moderate exercise 2-3 times per week.
- Build small amounts of exercise into your day: walk to work, take a 20-minute walk after dinner, take the stairs, do 10 minutes of yoga, hold plank position for 1 minute, get a standing desk or treadmill desk.

Sleep

- Sleep is foundational to well being.
- Aim for 8 hours of sleep nightly.
- Stop caffeine by 12pm; decrease or eliminate overall caffeine consumption.
- Be strategic about light: bright light in the morning, dim light at night.
- Consider using orange-tinted glasses at night (Uvex brand on Amazon).
- Turn off electronics and wind down for 1 hour before bed (dim the lights, take a bath, read a paper book in bed).

Heal the Gut

- If you have any digestive issues, it is critical to heal your gut in order to feel well. Here's how:
 - o **Avoid what irritates the gut:**
 - Avoid inflammatory foods (gluten, dairy, sugar, industrial vegetable oils)
 - When safe and appropriate, avoid medications that can be harmful to the gut (antibiotics, birth control pills, antacids and pain meds such as opiates, aspirin and ibuprofen)
 - If you suspect you have a gut infection, get evaluated and treated
 - o **Add in what heals the gut:**
 - Consume bone broth, fermented foods (raw sauerkraut, kimchi, beet kvass) and starchy tubers (sweet potatoes, plantains); take a probiotic
 - o **Give your gut a chance to heal:**
 - Sleep, manage stress and get a squatty potty (www.squattypotty.com)

Nutrition

- Eating a diet high in processed food increases risk of depression. Eat *real food* and avoid processed food.
- Avoid problematic substances such as sugar, artificial sweeteners, diet soda, MSG, GMO foods, food coloring, additives, preservatives, gluten and industrial vegetable oils (e.g., canola oil).
- Eat pastured meat, eggs and poultry, wild fish, organ meats, veggies, starchy tubers, fermented foods, bone broth, nuts, seeds, sprouted rice and legumes, and plenty of natural fats (butter, ghee, coconut oil, olive oil).
 - o Seafood: www.vitalchoice.com
 - o Pastured meats: www.grasslandbeef.com
 - o Fermented foods: www.wisechoicemarket.com & www.hawthornevalleyfarm.org
 - o Sprouted rice: TruRoots Organic Germinated Rice & Lentils
 - o I recommend *The Paleo Cure* by Chris Kresser as a helpful guide.
- Consider a 2-month trial of a gluten/dairy elimination diet if you experience digestive issues, constipation, diarrhea, IBS, acne, severe allergies, chronic sinus congestion, reflux, heartburn, migraine, eczema, thyroid issues, brain fog, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia or autoimmune disease.
- Note: if you decide to eliminate dairy, you can continue to consume pastured butter and ghee.

Substances

- Reduce or eliminate substances that can contribute to depression (e.g., alcohol).
- When safe & appropriate, eliminate medications that can cause mood disturbances, such as birth control pills, sleep aids, steroids, beta-blockers and benzodiazepines.
- Note: only make changes to medications under close medical supervision.

Light Therapy

- Light therapy is an effective treatment for depression year-round (not just for seasonal affective disorder).
- Use a 10,000-lux light box. For example: NatureBright SunTouch Plus Light and Ion Therapy Lamp ~\$70
- Keep your eyes open, but do not stare directly at the light.
- Start with 15 minutes in the morning for 4 days, and then increase to 30 minutes every morning.
- If you don't have time for a proper session, at least have the light box on in your room while you get ready in the morning (better than not doing it at all).

Stress Management

- Stress is often the most significant contributor to depression.
- Incorporate mind-body practices into your daily life (e.g., yoga, meditation, breathing exercises).
- Try to do any amount of mindfulness meditation every day. This can simply be sitting and observing your thoughts.
- Try to cultivate a compassionate, non-judgmental attitude toward yourself and toward your thoughts.
- Practice gratitude every night (list 3 things you're grateful for).
- Identify a creative outlet that you enjoy (paint, play with children, sing, play an instrument, dance).

Yoga & Meditation

- Yoga and meditation are both evidence-based treatments for depression.
- Try www.yogaglo.com, www.yogavibes.com, Zencast, Headspace or Buddhify.

Acupuncture

- There's a growing body of evidence supporting the use of acupuncture for depression. Try it!

Spiritual Practice

- Spiritual engagement is protective against depression.
- This can be prayer, meditation, spending time in nature or simply fostering a sense of connection to others.

Community & Relationships

- Cultivate a positive community; invest in relationships which make you feel good while challenging you to grow.
- Develop interpersonal skills and effectiveness: be present and emotionally available for others; "seek first to understand, then to be understood"; be kind, thoughtful and generous.

Supplementation

- Supplements can be helpful, but they're never a replacement for diet and lifestyle modifications.
- I recommend the following supplements *in addition* to everything else in this handout.

Morning

- **Fish oil** – *Green Pastures Blue Ice Royal Butter Oil Fermented Cod Liver Oil Cinnamon Tingle Flavor*
 - o I recommend the gel, but if you think you won't tolerate it, take capsules instead
- **Multivitamin** – *Pure Encapsulations Nutrient 950 with Vitamin K*
- **Turmeric** – *Source Naturals, Pure Encapsulations or New Chapter*
- **Probiotic** – *Prescript Assist*
- **Coconut Oil, MCT Oil or Brain Octane Oil** – *Bulletproof, Artisana or Dr. Bronners*

At Bedtime

- **Magnesium** – *Pure Encapsulations Magnesium Glycinate* 200-400mg at bedtime
- **Coconut Oil or MCT Oil** – take a spoonful before bed

Discuss the following supplements with your doctor, and consider a trial under medical supervision:

- **Rhodiola Rosea** – *Pure Encapsulations or Swedish Herbal Institute Arctic Root* – not safe in bipolar
- **SAMe** – *Source Naturals or Pure Encapsulations* – 200-600mg twice a day on an empty stomach

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