

Dealing With Depression;

What a depressing topic! Seriously though, it can be quite interesting and even life-saving. It can be fatal. Most importantly it can mimic so many different conditions and cause a lot of suffering. Folks with this disorder frequently come in with a large variety of problems/seemingly and often unrelated; headaches, abdominal pain, aches and pains all over the body, fatigue etc. Taking care of the depression often resolves all the other complaints.

What is depression? It's a neurotransmitter (NT) (NT) imbalance at the most basic level. NTs are chemical messengers that go from one nerve cell to the next, causing that cell to either "fire" or "not fire" or conduct an electrical imbalance. There are many different NTs in the brain, certain regions of the brain have predominantly certain types of these chemicals. Serotonin causes us to calm down and relax, Dopamine is the "feel good" NT that's also involved in certain addictions, Norepinephrine is involved in activating us and getting us going GABA is involved in calming us down. So at the most basic level depression is actually a PHYSICAL illness at a microscopic level (but yes, it's still "all in your head"!). The important point to remember however is that it's not due to a weak will or poor moral character.

Depression can be classified as Intrinsic or Extrinsic. Extrinsic is the easy one to understand; a great loss, perhaps a family death, loss of a job etc can cause a "depression" that's actually perhaps a form of grieving.

Intrinsic depression is a bit more difficult to understand, it's depression that comes on without an obvious triggering event. Sometimes there are hidden events involved though.

One of the questions that can give a clue is to "tell me about your spiritual life"... An open-ended question. Frequent responses such as "I was baptized a Methodist" give clues. Spirituality is your belief in and relationship with God/Higher Power/Supreme Being. Most folks in our society believe in the Judeo-Christian God. It's not important that the doctor try to "convert" a patient to any religion but to point out that perhaps the patient left God (of their understanding), not that God left them. To have a close relationship, you need to spend time with the other entity, for a supreme being such as God that involves Prayer and Meditation. Interestingly, these activities help build levels of NT's that often decline with the absence of adequate time for contemplation as is so often in our hectic "modern" lives.

There are many good medications that can also help correct these chemical imbalances. It's important to recall that one can't fill the bathtub while the drain is left open. By the same measure, medications alone won't correct depression without taking other measures at the same time. Closing the drain can be like starting work on some prayer, meditation, "alone time". The brain needs to process, it takes time to do this. Without adequate time it gets a backlog of work (often done in the subconscious) that needs to be done. The levels of some of the essential NT's will come back to the normal levels when the life is brought back into balance again. "Prozac Poop-out" is a term Doctors used for awhile to

describe the fact that this wonderful drug would lose effectiveness over a period of months to years in some people. Once they started doing the other essential things to balance their lives however it wouldn't be such a serious issue.

Taking medications such as Valium/Xanax/Klonopin for depression can be dangerous; they're addicting and don't do anything to correct the underlying brain chemistry imbalance. The same can be said for "street medications" such as alcohol, pot, caffeine & Nicotine, obviously cocaine and other drugs of abuse will cause similar problems.

So how do we TREAT depression? First it's a good idea to remind the patient to get their life in balance with adequate rest, good nutrition, spiritual life to deal with the stressors of life and get them to understand that we can't control everything in our lives (A good therapist can help!). Brain training using EEG Neurofeedback is another non-medication option, this involves training the brain to work properly with direct EEG/brain wave monitoring (there's a link to this on my website, www.tequestafamilypractice.com). There is a lab that can check urine amino acid profiles for those who want to avoid medication for depression. These amino acids are the precursors for the NT's, correcting the imbalance of amino acids can help restore NT balance but you need to know the basic information first with a urine test.

Medications that help treat depression often involve the Neurotransmitters, specifically Serotonin, Norepinephrine, Dopamine, sometimes GABA effects can be helpful. Sometimes we'll see patients who get "anxious" or agitated on these medications. This is generally a pretty good clue that this patient has a brain that is wired more along the lines of "bipolar" or "Manic-Depression". This disorder was once thought to be quite rare but further research shows it's more common than earlier investigators thought. The good news for it though is that these folks who are depressed respond well to mood stabilizer medications such as Lithium and the newer medications available. Some complicated patients will need a combination of medications for "augmented therapy" as well.

So cheer up, this may be "all in your head", but it's actually a physical ailment that is VERY treatable and will remove a lot of suffering once it's corrected!

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Electronically Signed

