
RESEARCHING YOUR OWN DEPRESSION

by

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I'm a great believer in self-help (which is why I'll never make a fortune as a counsellor!) So I've put together the following check list for people who suffer from depression as a start towards finding a cure. Perls (who invented Gestalt Therapy) said you can't move forwards until you know where you are now: so although it may not give you much pleasure to look at your depression in such detail, at least you may be able to give yourself some ideas of the nature of the beast, including the worst of it, so that you may be clearer about just what aspects of it you can deal with yourself and which will need practical or therapeutic or medical aid. I think depression can be cured in many cases: my own has gone almost completely and I know many people who have found a way out of the syndrome. So we start with what exactly you mean when you say you are 'depressed'.

What Do You Experience When You are Depressed?

1	2	3
Anxiety	Irritation/Anger	Sadness/Unhappiness
Fear/terror	Tension	Feeling something's missing
Despair	Frustration	Hollowness/emptiness
Obsession		
4	5	6
Lethargy	Sleeplessness	Confusion
Drowsiness	Lack of Feelings	Repetitive thoughts
Discouragement	Dullness	
	Woodenness	
	Inability to Act	

A lot of what people (and doctors!) describe as depression is anxiety. So, if most of your ticks are in category 1 and possibly 2, what you are suffering from may be an anxiety state: if you can't sit still or relax, that would suggest that you suffer from undue anxiousness. If you've only ticked 2, you may be suffering from buried aggression or anger. Category 3 may mean that you're grieving for someone or something.

Category 4 could suggest that you're not getting enough stimulation or positive feedback. Category 5 is the classic depression - no feelings, no expression on your face, feeling rather like a robot or automaton. Category 6 seems to occur in all kinds of depression and anxiety and suppression of feelings. Of course you may have ticked all of these categories in which case you may be suffering from exaggerated mood swings giving you highs when you do too much and exhaust yourself, and lows when you force yourself to act and also get exhausted.

Where in Your Body do You Feel These Feelings ?

Head	eyes	shoulders	arms	hands	chest
breathing	belly	buttocks	genitals	legs	feet
back	skin				

What Symptoms do You have When You're Depressed ?

sweating	shaking	stiffness	indigestion	diarrhoea
frequency/difficulty in passing urine			can't keep still	
feeling cold	breathless		prickly skin	sleeplessness
can't stay awake	constipation	rash	rash	
Other symptoms?

Can You Remember the **first time** You Felt Like This

describe that experience

How Often do You Feel Like This ?

Do You have a Cycle of Highs and Lows ?

Monthly? seasonally connected with your life style?

cyclical depression could indicate a hormonal problem .

What Sort of Event Seems to Trigger it off ?

This is worth some regular research - every time you have an attack and feel that something specific caused it, write it down. After several attacks, look at your list or ask a friend or therapist to look through it with you to see if there are any connected or similar factors.

What Makes it Go Away ?

time getting angry crying stimulation making love
sudden arrival of people or events music dancing laughing
talking about it not talking a hug a walk someone else's problems

you may need to research this as well: you may not realise that there are certain activities or events that turn it off again: so note them down and again look for common factors,.

Do You have any Allergies ? Do You Binge on any Particular Foods ?

A lot of depression, anxiety states and even more severe mental problems are caused by allergies. There are a lot of useful books around to help you to track these down. I find 'The Food Allergy Plan' by Keith Mumby (Unwin £2.95) very practical

Are You Taking any Drugs ?

find out if they can be depression inducing, and if so ask for an alternative.

Do You Drink ?

and be honest about this - alcohol is itself a depressant.

Are You Fit ?

Regular exercise? Healthy eating? Correct weight? Good posture

mens sana in corpore sano - a healthy mind in a healthy body is still true and relevant. Exercise can increase blood flow to the brain, tone up the glands and get sluggish systems working more efficiently to eliminate toxins.

Your Lifestyle ?

do you have
a variety of interests? hobbies? sports? enthusiasms? fun?

or are you single-minded? Do you get mental stimulation? If you're unbalanced towards one aspect of your life (workaholics often are) the other side of your personality may be sabotaging you in order to try to break through.

Causes

There are a lot of different opinions about whether finding the cause will necessarily effect a cure. But since a lot of people suffering from depression feel that it's irrational and that they might be going mad, discovering why your suffer from this misery-making and debilitating condition can at least help you to understand yourself, be more tolerant of yourself and hopefully enable you to de-condition yourself out of old 'scripts' and invent some new ones that are more beneficial to you. To find out what your conditioning as a child may have been, work through the exercises in Eric Berne's 'What do you say after you say hello?' (Corgi £2.95) or James and Koneward's 'Born to Win' (Signes £2.95) or read Skynner and John Cleese's 'Families and how to survive them' (Methuen £4.95) Here now are some common (too common) experiences that have caused depression later in life:

Causes	Possible effects in later life
Cruelty - physical, verbal, sexual abuse	An underlying fear; feeling unworthy
Neglect; lack of understanding	poor sense of self as person. Inability to make relationships.
Too high expecxtations: poor teaching	Despair: dissatisfaction with achievements
Family's negative attitude to life	Pointlessness, hopelessness, discouragement, pessimism
Too much attention	Self-consciousness. Only sense of self is other's opinion of you
Bereavement - this can include loss of home, relative, animal, toy, possession etc.	Sadness without current cause. Emptiness
Accidents, injury, disaster, war	fearfulness, pessimism
Unfair treatment, exploitation	Don't deserve good things; fatalism; anger (which may be suppressed)
Illness, constant pain, mental illness	Fear (of recurrence) insecurity
Allergies	Sudden bouts of fear, anxiety, depression etc.

Repressive attitudes, in parents
or other adults

Shame about sexuality, gender,
physical functions, appearance

Treatments

The most obvious ones, especially to readers of this journal, are going for personal therapy or counselling, joining growth or awareness or therapy groups. As well as these, reading more about the self and child development; medical treatment for allergies, hormonal problems or any other physical cause. Joining an assertiveness group and learning to express yourself instead of holding back your anger or hurt

It can be very useful to make yourself a list or a chart or a picture of your depression, its causes, symptoms and cures. Then you might decide which aspect of your life you might usefully change, and how you could do that. There may be very real problems or dissatisfactions that you could solve with help or support: for example, to do with your work or lack of it, where you live, how you spend your time, who you spend it with. Generally speaking, don't make decisions **whilst** you are feeling depressed or, if you do, don't act on them until the depression is over and you can evaluate them dispassionately. Look after yourself more when you have an attack - you are more prone to accidents or to illness at this time. So keep warm and be kind to yourself. If you can, distract yourself out of your inwardness (which is often a regression into an earlier, younger, unhappy time when you were more helpless and get into your awareness now by concentrating on each of your senses one by one (hearing, taste, touch, smell, sight, body feeling, temperature) you may be able to open up enough to do one of the things that helps you over an attack, like shouting, or writing it all down, or painting a picture of it, or having a hot bath, or whatever.

I hope there will be lots of advice in this issue to give you ideas for 'first aid'. I always found myself that, as soon as I admitted to myself and to anyone else around that I **was** depressed, I started to come out of it, even though that in itself was often a long and slow process. Not 'knowing' that I was feeling the thing that I called depression seemed to be the thing that kept me locked in that private Hell for the longest time.

It was very valuable then to use the 'as if' formula - I would say to myself 'I feel as if I am frightened or sad or despairing etc.' This seems to free your intellect to be clearer, so you can operate functionally and relegate the depressed feeling to a less important part of your consciousness. 'I can see that the sun is shining and I can type this letter accurately even though I feel **as if** the world is about to end'. This has worked for other people as well as for me.

I guess that the whole of this article is to do with recognising where you are even though that recognition seems at first to add to the pain.

To anyone who suffers from depression I would say 'Good Luck. There is a way out and I hope you can find yours soon.'

Time

Time, it heals nothing, it just hides the pain,
Time merely rearranges our memory, the pain remains the same,
Time waits on other things, a past recorded,
It changes nothing.

We await on time, slaves to the hour, to the minute,
We follow life like a second hand following the hour
And our cycle is devoured waiting on time.

The pain that was, is there waiting for a trigger,
Recalled it assumes it's former intensity,
Tricked by time into a false sense of security.

We sit and mope and hope that it will go away with time
And all the while gods laugh at their playthings
Who focus on a time that is never now.

Fools to destiny we leave to time things beyond time's control,
Trusting to fate what can only be cured by action, not forgetting,
Nothing can really be forgotten, everything must find expression.

Time can not help us if we can not help ourselves.

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