

NATURAL WAYS TO ALLEVIATE DEPRESSION

By Rev. Sonia Herbert

Depression is a common mental disorder afflicting millions of people of all ages right around the world. It is known as 'the common cold' of mental disorders and is the most serious and widespread psychiatric disease of our times. Almost all of us experience depression at some time in our lives and in its milder form it is quite normal. More severe depression, however, causes despair, immobilizing apathy, fear, inner desperation and exhaustion. It robs its victims of peace, sleep, time and effectiveness.



Millions of dollars are spent in the treatment of depression with costly medication each year. It is found, however, that there are non-pharmaceutical treatments that prove to relieve symptoms of depression. There is much that one can do behaviourally and cognitively to improve their mental health. If you have mild to moderate depression you may find the following tips to be very helpful.

1. **Establish a walking routine.**

Studies have shown that walking regularly can be as effective as drugs at reducing depression.

2. **Talk to someone about it.** By sharing your thoughts with someone you allow them to understand you. When you feel understood an emotional burden is lifted from your shoulders. This is partly what is meant by Galatians 6:2, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

3. **Breathe slowly and deeply.** Slowing your breathing helps to calm

and relax you. It slows your heart rate and allows you to more easily focus your attention. Short, ragged breath rhythms, on the other hand, contribute to a frantic, stressed and unfocused state of mind.

4. **Listen to your favourite music.**

When you listen to music you enjoy your body responds. Your blood flow increases, stress-related hormones like cortisol decrease and your pain eases. A 2016 study showed that both music and meditation improve the mood of older adults suffering from mental decline.

5. **Read the Bible.** The Bible has verses and passages that address depression and anxiety. Philippians 4:6-7 states, "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Isaiah 41:10 says, "fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

6. **Enjoy nature.** Watch a sunrise or sunset. Taking the time to relax and



watch a sunrise can reset your mind. It will help you focus on the aesthetics of nature. When you appreciate beauty your spirits are lifted.

7. **Call an old friend and stay in touch.**

Having no friends leads to psychological dysfunction. Picking up the phone and giving old friends a call is good for mental and physical health.

8. **Visit shut-ins at the nursing home or at their homes.**

By visiting a shut-in, you not only minister to them, but they minister to you as well. You learn to slow down, focus on someone else, and give love. This is therapeutic.

9. **Plant some flowers or vegetables.** Gardening can be very relaxing and therapeutic. It is so effective that there are professional specialists called horticultural therapists. Gardening provides purposeful and meaningful activity while offering restoration and respite from mental stress.

10. **Pray daily.** A study by Dr. Koenig and other colleagues at Duke University showed that six weekly prayers with patients at the hospital reduced their stress, anxiety and depression while raising their optimism.

11. **Tense up your muscles and then relax them in a progressive manner.** Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) can help alleviate disturbing and disruptive emotional symptoms. This relaxation technique can help your body get out to the fight/flight response.

12. **Write down what you are thankful for.** Making the habit of

identifying three things you are grateful each day for even a few weeks can create improvement in depression. In fact, some scientists believe that the impact is as strong as an anti-depressant! Practicing gratitude can also decrease overeating, increase empathy for others and improve self-care.

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13. **Join a choir and sing praise songs.** Singing lowers the levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the body. It improves life quality and decreases anxiety. Research suggests that singing as part of group even synchs the heart rates of group members, which is almost like a meditative state.

14. **Stretch frequently.** Studies reveal that stretching calms the mind and gives the mind a mental break.

A pearl is a beautiful thing that is produced by an injured life. It is the tear that results from the injury of the oyster. The treasure of our being in this world is also produced by an injured life. If we had not been wounded, if we had not been injured, then we will not produce the pearl.

Stephan Hoeller