



Depression: A Holistic Approach

11 Steps for Complete Recovery

Clinical depression is more than feeling sad or “down” for a short while. It is a group of long-lasting symptoms that significantly interfere with day-to-day functioning. Symptoms may include negative thinking, sleep disturbances, appetite problems, lack of energy, sluggish movements, feelings of hopelessness, self-blame, indecisiveness, lack of interest in life, distress about making mistakes, difficulty concentrating, feeling like a failure, irritable and easily frustrated, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, no desire for sex, loss of ambition and enthusiasm, excessive guilt, and not being interested in things you used to enjoy. When these symptoms persist for several weeks or more, its time to seek help. Your medical professional should use a scientific, nine-question screening tool that tells the severity of your condition.

Holistic treatment plans address each symptom, and help resolve the root causes. There may be imbalances in your physical, emotional, social or spiritual life. A holistic approach considers them all-- and gives you a greater chance of recovery. Depression is a wake-up call, inviting you to learn new skills, and achieve a new level of authentic happiness.

Factors that lead to depression can include stressful life events, thyroid conditions, hormonal imbalances, blood sugar levels, distorted thinking, allergies, grief, environmental toxins, social isolation, life transitions, traumatic experiences, abuse, bullying, poverty, dangerous environments, chronic illness and many other situations. You are unique and the causes of your depression include a unique combination of factors.

Mild to moderate depression can be treated very effectively without medication, using scientifically valid methods. Many studies show that methods such as CBT, are more effective than medication. In severe depression, when medication may be needed, holistic methods enhance the effectiveness of medical treatment. You can use both.

A holistic treatment plan may include some of these steps (not all at once, of course!)

1. A physical exam to uncover any physical causes of depression. Hormone imbalances, inflammation, poor digestion, heavy metal toxicity, vitamin deficiencies, “Brain allergies” to foods, mercury poisoning, adrenal fatigue and blood sugar imbalances can contribute to depression. In addition to working with an MD, you may also wish to consider complementary treatment providers such as Naturopathic Doctors, homeopaths, acupuncturists and energy workers. Nancy Watters has studied homeopathy, nutrition, Reiki, sound therapy and acupressure, in addition to clinical psychology.
2. Find a sympathetic, knowledgeable counsellor, who supports a holistic approach, who can coach you through lifestyle changes, and help you uncover any deeper reasons that are causing you to get stuck. Interview several people to find someone you feel good rapport with, and whose skills match your needs.

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3. Learn proven techniques to ditch ANTS—*automatic negative thoughts*. Reprogram cognitive distortions using CBT and positive psychology. Nancy Watters can train you.
4. Calm your body/mind. Use stress reduction techniques such as sound therapy, progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, meditation, Reiki, energy psychology, guided imagery or Emotional Freedom Technique (“tapping”). Nancy Watters incorporates these techniques into treatment plans when indicated, and teaches her clients related self-help tools.
5. Get regular, vigorous exercise.
6. Make food your best medicine. Eat “nutrient dense” foods. They support your brain health, and mental health. Books by Dr. Joel Fuhrman can help.
7. Take a vacation from everyday toxic “drugs, including sugar, caffeine, alcohol and nicotine. Brain scans show that sugar has the same effect as cocaine in the brain!
8. Live green and clean—reduce exposure to as many environmental toxins as possible.
9. Connect with caring friends who support your wellbeing.
10. Find purpose and meaning. Engage in meaningful work and community service. Connect with your Creator, Divine Source, Spirit, Nature, to maintain hope and serenity.
11. Understand the pros and cons of anti-depressant medication, and how to work with your medical team to make the best choice for you. The shocking truth about antidepressant medications is that there is little scientific evidence that they work better than sugar pills. They also have damaging side-effects and are potentially highly addictive. Yet they are the most widely prescribed medications, and the most profitable for drug manufacturers. More than half the people taking antidepressants experience side effects such as low energy, dulled feelings, increased aggression, agitation, reduced appetite, sexual dysfunction, improper brain development or gastrointestinal bleeding. Dr. Grace Jackson found that antidepressants increase the risk of suicide by two to four times in adults, and by three times in children (Jackson 2005, p.122) In addition, statistics show that when people stop taking antidepressants, they often relapse into depression within a few months because the underlying reasons for depression have not been addressed. If you have mild to moderate depression, natural methods may be more effective than medication, without the risks.¹

Free **and low-cost self-help resources**, including workbooks, DVDs, book lists and links at www.nancywatters.com

If you need **IMMEDIATE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT** or **are feeling suicidal**, caring helpers are available 24 hours a day at [Vancouver Island Crisis Line: \(888\) 494-3888](http://www.vicrisis.ca/) <http://www.vicrisis.ca/>

¹ Visit <http://chriskresser.com/depression> for “The Dark Side of Antidepressants”, “Treating Depression without Drugs”, “Placebo as Effective as Antidepressants”, and more.