

TEN WAYS TO BEAT THE BLUES

Coping with mild depression

By Stephanie Jackson

The World Health Organization predicts that by 2020 major depression will be the world's most prevalent cause of disability after heart disease. It's a frightening mental condition that frequently requires medical treatment or professional counselling. Sufferers may act irrationally, become aggressive, cry uncontrollably, and be unable to think logically. It's not appropriate to tell someone in the dark throes of depression to "Pull yourself together!" It's just not that easy. But if you're



suffering from a less severe bout of depression – simply feeling down in the dumps or plagued by the blues - you can fight your way back to a happier life with some simple and inexpensive self-help methods for recovery.

Almost everyone feels down in the dumps now and then. It's part of life, but it can affect your work, your family and social life, and even your physical health. Fortunately, it's

usually a short-term problem without the severe symptoms that threaten the well-being of those who suffer from depression. And with a little help, you'll get through it in a relatively short span of time, and a smile will replace the frown born from a bout of the blues and bring the sparkle back to your eyes once again.

COLOUR THERAPY

Strange as it may seem, colours can actually affect your moods, so toss those drab grey or black clothes back into the wardrobe and put on something bright and colourful. The warm tones of yellow and red will chase the blues away, and if you add some colourful accessories and a bit of bling, life will soon begin to look a little brighter. If your style has never included colourful creations, head to your nearest op shop where they'll have everything you'll need, at rock bottom prices.

AROMATHERAPY

Buy yourself a bunch of flowers, preferably roses or carnations that will fill your home or office with their delicate perfume, or indulge in a little aromatherapy in other ways. Aromatherapy oils, which are derived from plants such as sage, basil, roses, sandalwood, lavender, and jasmine, can be applied during a massage, added to a hot bath, or simply daubed onto the skin as a perfume. They are believed to aid in decreasing stress and anxiety, and if a few drops of lavender oil are dropped onto your pillow, the chance of a good night's sleep is greatly improved.

MASSAGE

Treat yourself to a full body massage. Massage has been used to relax tense muscles and to relieve muscular aches and pains since its use was first recorded in China during the second century B.C. This ancient treatment is now known to increase the production of the mood controlling chemicals serotonin and dopamine, and to lower levels of the stress related hormone cortisol. And the simple act of a gentle human touch can have a relaxing affect as the masseur's hands work their magic.

TRANQUILLITY

Have a picnic in a picturesque setting, and if there is no one with whom you can share your day, don't worry. Embrace solitude instead of fearing it, for in a quiet environment, solitude will allow the chatter of your mind to subside, and the subtle and calming sounds of nature to be heard.



of serotonin, and thus reduce stress and anxiety.

If you've found a picnic spot beside running water, you'll reap an extra benefit, for in addition to the peaceful state of mind that the sound of flowing water can induce, your mood will be improved thanks to negative ions that are created by the movement of water. When these reach the bloodstream, they are believed to produce biochemical reactions that increase levels

GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

Gardening is a chance to get in touch with nature in your own backyard, and getting your hands dirty can have some surprisingly beneficial results. Plant a tree, a shrub, or some colourful annuals, or sow some seeds, and over the next few days, as you watch new shoots emerge from the soil and the wonder of life unfold, you'll wonder why you ever let your own life get you down.

ENJOY LIFE'S SIMPLE PLEASURES

Don't confine yourself to your home and cocoon yourself in misery. The best things in life really are free, so get out and about and enjoy the simple pleasure of feeding the ducks in a park, flying a kite, or watching the fiery beauty of a sunset. Stroll through a botanic garden and admire nature's diverse creations, or dawdle through an art gallery to see the best and most inspiring examples of human creativity, and it will be hard not to be emotionally uplifted.

TALK TO SOMEONE

Talk to a friend who is a good listener. Don't be too embarrassed to share your most intimate problems, for talking about them is infinitely better than keeping them bottled up. Everyone's been down in the dumps at some time or another, so there's a good chance that whoever you decide to confide in will have experienced similar emotions at some time in their life.

EXERCISE

Go for a walk in a park or along a bushland trail – anywhere away from the noise and chaos of the city. Fresh air and exercise, together with a quiet environment, can be very beneficial to both your physical and mental wellbeing. Exercise is believed to reduce the levels of the cortisol in the body, and research has found that regular exercise, even if it's little more than 15 minutes of walking, improves sleep patterns, decreases stress, and increases self-esteem.

A HEALTHY DIET

Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. A healthy and balanced diet is essential if you don't want to be down in the dumps on a regular basis. Research has shown that the vitamin C in many varieties of fresh vegetables and fruit; the vitamin E and magnesium in nuts; the folic acid in green leafy vegetables, particularly spinach; and omega 3 in fish such as salmon and sardines all play a role in controlling depression. With so many nutritious and beneficial foods to choose from, a healthy diet that will help to chase the blues away can be a delicious one.

POSITIVE THINKING

The recipe for defeating the blues can be a blend of many ingredients, but most importantly, try to remind yourself of the positive aspects of your life. Don't let negative thoughts dominate your life, and accept the things that you simply cannot change. When one route through life appears blocked, don't despair. A new route will eventually open up, and when it does, forge ahead, refuse to let life defeat you, even for a moment.

Remind yourself that your life is like a glass half full rather than a glass half empty, and will eventually be topped up with new and perhaps unexpected pleasures that will make the time when the blues ruled your life nothing more than a faded memory.

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