

Choice

Health & Wellbeing



www.choicehealthmag.com

The Leading Publication for Complementary Health, Education and Wellbeing

Your bodywork blueprint for massage success

In this issue:

Grapefruit Oil	How to show value	The M Technique
8 	18 	60 

Your Health and Wellbeing Success Starts Here!

Are you a health-conscious consumer, looking to come into the industry or looking for a suitable treatment? Find out what the experts say and read.

Get through the blues

an Ayurvedic perspective on depression

We quite often flippantly use the term, 'I feel so depressed' when what we really mean is that we are just rather sad about something or feeling generally melancholic. However there are those individuals whose experience of true depression or long-term low mood and disturbed psychological energy can be very debilitating.

According to allopathic medicine, depression occurs when the normal levels of neurotransmitters such as serotonin drop, causing an imbalance. SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) antidepressants are designed to manage depression by temporarily increasing serotonin levels to improve the mood but do not necessarily treat the underlying causes or offer a deeper sense of understanding the self.

Vishada, as depression is known in Ayurveda, is considered to be due to the suppression of *Prana* (one's life force energy). It is generally characterised by one or more of a variety of symptoms such as feelings of persistent sadness, hopelessness, despondency, irritability, loss of joy or enthusiasm for previously pleasurable activities. There can be feelings of emptiness, fatigue, insomnia or disturbed sleep, over sleeping, social withdrawal, feeling worthless, pessimism and poor concentration. There can also be many other physiological symptoms including disturbed digestion. Sometimes the winter season can cause people to feel this way; for others it can be triggered by a sudden traumatic experience such as divorce, the death of a loved one or life stresses such as finances or relationships.

As with all health conditions, Ayurveda first

attempts to identify the root cause of the condition; although depression is primarily an imbalance of the mind, the focus is no different. Emotional pain, regret from the past or anxiety about the future are key contributors to depression. Long term unresolved, suppressed emotional pain can be mentally depleting. People live with sadness, holding on to negative thought patterns almost as if there is an intimate relationship between them that they cannot let go.

There is a lack of awareness that we have the power to choose our thoughts from moment to moment. So we can choose to feel sad and become enslaved by it through sheer conditioning. Or we can be made aware of our ability to choose. We can choose to take the reins of our mind and emotions; we can choose peace and joy and to change our life. This, of course, may not come easily or naturally and takes time, effort and, often, the help of professional guides, but ultimately a shift can be created at the core of our being to eradicate conditions such as depression.

Ayurveda does not just focus on curative interventions. The true beauty of this science lies in its quest to treat the root cause if remedial action is needed. It applies measures to optimally raise psychological wellbeing from the outset



when early signs can be noticed or just by education of a natural '*sattvic*' way of life.

Ayurveda outlines three mind qualities (*gunas*): *sattva*, which is characterised by intelligence, peace, joy and harmony. This is the *guna* that is pure and is the strongest quality of yogis. *Rajas* is the *guna* of activity, energy, passion, movement and turbulence. *Tamas* is the *guna* of inertia, inactivity and darkness. From an Ayurvedic perspective, depression is caused by a disconnection to the inner self and,



Depression can be influenced by an imbalance of any of the three *doshas* (*vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*) that can also be reflective of the *gunas*. Depending on which *dosha* dominates, the symptomatology will vary and the line of treatment should be tailored accordingly:

Vata dominance	Pitta dominance	Kapha dominance
Fearful, anxious, poor appetite, weight loss, hypersensitivity, poor sleep, restlessness, digestive disturbance, constipation, excessive chatter, sensitive to the cold, general vata constitution.	Sensitive to heat, red eyes, irritability, warm body temperature, loss of hair or premature greying, feeling hot, loose bowel movements.	Low energy, sensitivity to the cold, overweight, overeating, oversleeping, kapha-dominant constitution.



predominantly, by an imbalance or excess of *tamas*, associated with *kapha dosha*. *Rajasic* and *sattvic* qualities are both essential components of the journey to recovery from depression. That is, there cannot be pure consciousness and peace at the core (*sattva*) without first having an element of activity and energy (*rajas*).

Depression often prevails when there is an imbalance to the *kapha dosha* which stems from *vata* going out of balance, which then triggers *pitta* to go out of balance. The electro-chemicals of the brain overreact in response to external stimuli causing *prana vayu* to become imbalanced. This then causes the body's metabolism to break down (*sadhaka pitta* slows down) to which the body then responds by *tarpa kapha* trying to gel everything together. The result is lethargy, heaviness and stagnation in the body and negativity, hopelessness and depression in the mind. In other words, the circulating imbalanced *doshas* get lodged in the weakened area (*khavaigunya*) – in this instance, the nervous system (*majja dhatu*) – interfering with its normal functions and triggering depression.

Since Ayurveda takes a holistic approach to managing depression, spiritual counselling, compassion and encouragement are all supportive components of the path of long-term recovery.

Here are some holistic Ayurvedic approaches to help restore balance to the mind, body and soul:

1. Start the day by rising in the *vata* part of morning by 6 a.m. rather than the *kapha* time of 6–10 a.m. which can lead to dullness of the mind and body.
2. Ensure you eliminate the bowels daily in the morning since the stagnant material in the bowels can cause dullness, lethargy and headaches. Start your day with stewed fruits such as apples, figs, or similar, for easy digestion.
3. Take early morning walks outside in nature to stimulate energy with the fresh light and air of the rising sun. This can be part of a daily exercise regime. Exercise can stimulate positive thoughts and release positive hormones as well as activate stagnant emotions, hormones and lax muscles. Yoga *asanas* are another great way to invigorate the body in the early morning as well as to stimulate digestive organ activity.
4. After exercising, give yourself a daily morning hot oil *abhyanga* to improve peripheral circulation, allow toxins to be cleared from the body tissues and channels as well as to calm and relax the body and mind. *Vata dosha*, which gets easily aggravated by stress, can also be pacified.
5. Go to sleep in the *kapha* time phase of the evening, ideally by 10 p.m. to aid a more restful, deep and prolonged sleep. Going to sleep later, in the *pitta* time, can mean sleep can be disturbed and there is a tendency for the mind to be active.
6. Choose a diet of rejuvenating, unprocessed, natural foods that increase *ojas* – the essence of vitality. Such foods include: ghee, almonds, milk, cloves, dates, walnuts, pear, coconut, raisins, buttermilk, fresh fruits and vegetables.
7. Increase stimulating herbs and spices in the diet that enhance *agni* such as ginger, black pepper, coriander, cumin, turmeric, cinnamon and clove.
8. Several Ayurvedic herbs are available to support depression as part of a holistic healing plan that can be devised by an Ayurvedic practitioner. *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera*) and *Brahmi* (*Bacopa moniera*) are amongst the two most commonly available herbs with anti-depressant properties. *Guduchi* is also a great general rejuvenator and immune boosting herb which can also enhance cognitive functions.

However, the key to releasing depression is to have a shift in consciousness and to change the belief patterns that underlie emotional disturbance. Meditation and *pranayama* breathing techniques are highly effective tools for connecting to the 'higher self' and living more in the present moment. These can have a direct effect on the nervous system and brain chemistry and, therefore, natural mood enhancing neurotransmitters can be released. These techniques not only have a positive result for those with depression but they are also highly effective preventative measures for those going through a phase of temporary sadness or low mood or as a way of life so that a depressive state does not arise in the first place. Much research now shows that yogic *pranayama* exercises can positively influence the nervous system, brain chemistry and human physiology. Meditation enables you to connect to the depths of your core existence and inner wisdom, kindling the zest for life.

A practitioner is able to offer personalised and *dosha*-specific healing modalities; however, pacifying the dominant *dosha* would be the starting point in most cases. For example, in the case of *pitta*-dominant depression, when a person becomes irritable or angry, irrational or even displays violent or self-destructive behaviour, could be indicative of extreme self-criticism or low self esteem. Some effective measures such as *ashwagandha*, Brahmi ghee, tea capsules, Brahmi oil massage to the body and head, treatments such as *shirodhara* and *shiro basti*, aromas of rose, sandalwood and lavender which are soothing for *sadhaka pitta* would be advisable. All these interventions should be supported by a *pitta*-pacifying diet and lifestyle; avoiding pungent, sour, salty and oily substances as well as late nights, alcohol and caffeine, etc. is advised.

Please note that you should consult both your doctor and your Ayurvedic practitioner before changing your medication plan in the case of depression. **CHW**

© As a member of the APA, Geeta Vara is a fully qualified Ayurvedic practitioner working in Central SW London and Kent, providing personalised consultations, treatments and corporate and small group workshops. For more information about Ayurvedic psychological or other health concerns, please visit: www.geetavara.co.uk