

# DEPRESSION CURES:

What Your Doctor Won't Tell You

By Alexandra Massey

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a passage that Briana wrote after I asked her to explain her typical day. Briana talks about herself in the third person.

"She laid on the couch in the living room wrapped in a heavy blanket, a cocoon that helped keep the rest of the world at bay. The kids would be home from school in a minute. Part of her imagined getting a tray of snacks ready and sitting down with them to talk about their day. But her body was too numb to move, and it was just so easy to let the blackness settle back in, cloud her mind and body and sink into the familiar black, bottomless pit that she'd come to know as normal. The thought that she couldn't even get off the couch for her kids reinforced the loathing she had for herself.

The endless cycle of negative thoughts and self-hate spun around her head every waking minute of the day and, frankly, there didn't seem to be any way out. She knew that as the kids came in the door she would point to the refrigerator and switch over the TV to their programs and she'd drag herself upstairs and into her bedroom and pull the bed sheets over her head hoping the older one could get some semblance of a meal on the table. This was no way to raise the kids but she had no choice because the depression ruled her life and she couldn't not obey it."

Briana from Atlanta, Georgia, 2016.

Depression affects most of us at some point in our lives. The World Health Organization states that, globally, an estimated 350 million people of all ages suffer from depression and it is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and is a major contributor to the overall global burden of disease. In the U.S., the National Institute of Mental Health states that almost 15 million Americans suffer from depression at any given time.

That is 15 million people living in a state of disconnectedness, loneliness and despair; some feeling so bad they want to die.

In Part One this book will walk you through the journey of depression examining what happens when you eventually turn to your Doctor for help. It then explains what your Doctor will offer you in terms of treatment and why Doctors are limited in what options are available to them – to help you.

The facts say it for themselves: traditional, prescriptive, medicinal treatments for depression are not working. Not only are more and more people become chronically depressed but also the rates of recovery are, statistically, going down. For whatever reason, it seems that the authorities are not willing to examine this problem and bring the industry (for that's what it is) into question and recognize that we, as a depressed world, cannot continue to take drugs that don't offer a long term solution and, at worse, contribute to a depressive society.

In Part Two this book will pinpoint some alternative treatments for depression. Some of these are scientifically based and some of them have credence in their widespread use. We look at other choices that many people can adopt quickly and with immediate results.

You will not be given these alternative choices by your doctor because, as we see in Part One, our industry isn't disciplined in offering a range of treatments and our medical schools don't teach doctors to take a wider view on what other remedies may work.

However, a note of caution, this book is not asking you to relinquish any medical advice. Please read and take heed of our medical disclaimer at the end of this book.

A  
PART ONE  
LL  
BOUT  
DEPRESSION

## CHAPTER 1

# WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

**D**epression is described in the dictionary as being 'low in spirit; downcast'. What it actually feels like is a cloud of lead particles that settle on the soul. It is the heaviest weight we are ever going to feel. It is also the most stubborn of feelings, which can drive us to insanity. It sears the very essence of us and dirties our vision. It has the lightness of a gas cloud but the weight of a concrete overcoat. It seeps into every crevice of our being.

When we are depressed we cannot be bothered with our own potential. We cannot lift our heads enough to see that we have true value in the world. We cannot give ourselves in close relationships because we become absent in the company of those we love. We care less about how we look or we overdo our looks when we go out to mask ourselves from the world. We stumble through the day trying to find some meaning for the feelings that ravage us. We lose our motivation to pursue our true vocation and in doing so, compromise our soul.

We feel like victims – buffeted by the rough winds of life. We cannot grasp anything solid to pull ourselves out of the storm. Either we see nothing but unfairness, or we stoop to martyrdom and believe we deserve nothing better. We lose our sense of reason and are unable to take an objective view of our circumstances and address what is fact and what is fiction.

And, don't be fooled by those people deemed a 'success'. Many 'successful' people are on the run – running away from their own depression - trying to escape the darkness by making enough money or becoming well known so the trappings of success will cushion them from their distress. But, the pain pursues them with inches to

spare. The faster they run, the faster it runs. There is an old adage, 'When I get there, then I will be happy.' But we never arrive. This thinking is a one-way track to disaster.

The problem with depression is that it does not allow us to stand still. We either get worse, or we get better. One common symptom of depression is mood swings, going from feeling ecstatic to feeling suicidal in mere minutes. We are used to the highs and lows; we thrive on them. They give meaning to the day. But this thinking exacerbates the depression by keeping us in a state of anxiety. When the process of recovery from depression begins, it can seem as though nothing is happening, but this may be because we have stopped the backward drag.

The fastest route to recovery is the hardest route. It involves dedication and exertion without props. It involves giving up and letting go. It requires us to acknowledge we have hit rock bottom. There are many ways to tackle depression and to help us move forward, but the most powerful approach is to turn around and face it head on.

Doing so initiates a change that will resonate for the rest of your life. You will look back and be excited about hitting this point. I look back and understand I would never have reached this point of restoration, excitement, hope, strength and joy had I not hit a point of no return. Restoration is available to anyone who embarks upon tackling depression through the suggestions in this book.

## CHAPTER 2

# SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Overwhelming tiredness
- Insomnia
- Self-loathing
- Rage
- Immense sadness
- Inability to do anything worthwhile
- Feeling dead
- Feeling stuck
- Feeling isolated
- Harming ourselves
- Feeling lonely
- Thoughts of suicide
- Not caring whether others like us or not
- Having no feelings – numb
- Eating junk
- Smoking
- Sabotaging friendships
- Behaving violently
- Stealing
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Gambling to excess
- Being obsessive about sex
- Losing all interest in sex
- Abusing children
- Compulsively cleaning
- Self-harm

## CHAPTER 3

# GETTING HELP FROM YOUR DOCTOR

**W**hen you feel so badly that you need help, the first place you go is to the doctor. The doctor will then assess you with a checklist list of questions, which will determine for the doctor) whether or not you are suffering from depression. The problem is, that the doctor usually sees the patient for a maximum of 20 minutes. So when someone comes in and says they're not sleeping well or that their mood is low, there's typically not enough time to do a comprehensive investigation. So once the checklist has been completed, the doctor will usually say something like, "You might benefit from an antidepressant." This statement comes at you without any further diagnosis from a professional in the mental health field and although the doctor is doing his/her best to help you within a 15 to 20 minute time frame, the scope for a detailed examination is just not there.

Data from national surveys (for example, National Institute of Mental Health) shows that the increasing trend in long-term antidepressant use was almost entirely in adults who received medications from general medical providers. Even when you go to a counselor you have an assessment which lasts at least an hour, if not longer. But going through your doctor means that assessment needs to be done quickly and it's often sketchy. However, we can't blame our doctors, because both medical school and payments from pharmaceutical companies have taught them to reach for the prescription pad.

### Dollars For Doctors

It may not surprise you to learn that doctors and medicine are governed by the pharmaceutical industry. In fact, it's been said that doctors have been reduced to being drug deliverymen.

A paper published by ProPublica, an independent, non-profit organization that produces investigative journalism in the public interest, outlines how much money doctors make from drug companies.

It's been highlighted that earnings for activities besides patient care in 2014 averaged \$6,000 for radiologists and \$29,000 for orthopedists, with other specialties falling somewhere in between.

Some of these earnings are from drug companies for speaking formally about a specific drug, either to a group of patients or to other doctors. A common speaking fee is \$1,000 per talk, though many make more than that. If the talk is not near the doctor's home location, then airfare, food and lodging are often provided in addition to the base fee.

Most doctors speak on more than one occasion for the same drug or device. So, given that your doctor may be on the payroll of a drug company that makes antidepressants, is he/her the best person from whom to take an objective view on your treatment options?

And the truth is, doctors aren't motivated to explore alternative approaches to beating depression. They are simply not trained in this methodology. Instead, they are directed towards prescribing medication as a first stop.

And when we're depressed and go to our doctor for help, it's very difficult at that point to stand back and assess exactly what the doctor has to offer. When they offer antidepressants as a 'cure' for the depression, it's extremely hard to say 'no thanks'.

## CHAPTER 4

# THE DRUGS DON'T WORK

The studies are unequivocal in showing us that antidepressants just don't work. One study published in the New England Journal Of Medicine found that pharmaceutical companies selectively publish studies on antidepressants. Nearly all of their studies show when the drugs are effective, but almost none of the studies show these drugs as ineffective, which leads us to believe they work. This has led to antidepressants being the second most prescribed drug after cholesterol-lowering drugs. Not only that, these studies show not a lot of benefit is derived for those taking the drugs compared to those taking a placebo.

Of course, what the studies don't highlight is the extreme negative effects of taking antidepressants. It's been shown that 86 percent of people taking antidepressants have one or more side effects, including sexual dysfunction, fatigue, insomnia, loss of mental abilities, nausea, weight gain and, incredibly, increased thoughts of suicide.

The problem lies with the authorities, particularly the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), as pharmaceutical companies are not forced to publish all the results of their studies, only publishing those they want. Unpublished studies are not easy to find. Researchers of the study in the New England Journal of Medicine had to hunt down hidden data under the Freedom of Information Act to identify submerged records. The authors of the study stated "This current system makes it impossible for scientific journals to provide a valid picture of the efficacy of antidepressants."

So, if we can't trust published data from the drug companies to offer a clear picture of the drugs they make and test, or trust the paid

physicians to give us an unbiased opinion of the drugs they want us to take, who do we trust to treat us with integrity and care for depression?

Added to this, researchers from the Virginia Commonwealth University in the U.S. and McMaster University in Canada , state, "People who take an antidepressant are far more likely to suffer recurring bouts of depression than someone who decides on an alternative approach."

Taking a drug almost doubles your risk of suffering a relapse, say researchers after reviewing a range of studies that monitored the effectiveness of antidepressants and placebos, or sugar pills, on groups of patients with major depression.

Overall, depressed people who took no drugs or were given a placebo had a 25 percent likelihood of suffering a further episode in the future, whereas those who took an antidepressant were 42 percent more likely to do so.

The researchers believe the drugs interfere with the brain's self-regulatory processes for coping with depression, causing these processes to overcompensate when the drug treatment stops, triggering another depressive episode.

Depression may be a natural and beneficial process as the brain works to cope with stress or loss, the researchers concluded.

## CHAPTER 5

# WHAT WAS THOUGHT TO CAUSE DEPRESSION?

**T**raditionally it was thought that depression was caused by a deficiency of certain neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) interfering with the transmission of nerve impulses, leading to depression. Serotonin is the neurotransmitter flagged as being the deficiency leading doctors to prescribe more and more of the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI's) with names like Zoloft, Cipramil, Priligy and Lustral.

A neuroscientist called Joseph Coyle of Harvard Medical School reportedly told Scientific American in 2014, "Chemical imbalance is sort of last-century thinking. It's much more complicated than that."

To expand on what he was saying, it appears that if we take an antidepressant, we might feel better in the same way that if we take an aspirin for our headache, the pain will decrease. However, this doesn't mean the lack of aspirin was the cause of the pain. In the same way, it doesn't mean antidepressants correct the original cause of the depression.

If you carry through the argument put forward by the drug companies that depression is simply a lack of serotonin in the brain, then why aren't the drugs more effective? One review article from UCLA found that one third of people who were depressed and taking antidepressants didn't feel better.

A World Health Organization screening study of depressive patients in 15 cities all over the world found that those who had not been exposed to psychiatric medicine "did significantly better" than those taking such drugs, with "milder" and fewer depressive

symptoms. This study took place in 1998 and since then, the FDA has ignored this data and continued to allow drug companies to make and sell drugs that are not effective and sometimes even harmful.

So, the assumption that depression is caused by a deficiency of certain neurotransmitters has to now be challenged. Rates of depression and anxiety are soaring, particularly among teenagers, and some sources put the figure as high as 70 percent in the past 25 years. The number of children and young people turning up in emergency departments with a psychiatric condition has more than doubled since 2009; represented in part by hospital admissions for teenagers with eating disorders, a psychiatric illness which has almost doubled over the past three years. Disorders have also almost doubled.

According to The Independent newspaper (February, 2016) the American College Health Association surveyed 100,000 college students at 53 U.S. campuses and found that 84 percent of students felt unable to cope, 79 percent were exhausted, 60 percent felt very sad, and more than half experienced overwhelming anxiety.

These figures indicate that teenagers are not just on a gradual decline of mental health; they are in the grip of real disaster. These numbers tell us that 84 percent of students are just not able to cope and they need some professional help.

What it also tells us is that if depression was caused by a deficiency of serotonin levels, then increasing levels of serotonin should alleviate the symptoms right away. But antidepressants don't work immediately, and in fact, can take up to a month to alleviate symptoms.

Another problem is one of whether the antidepressant actually works. Serotonin-specific antidepressant drugs don't work on everyone. In fact, new estimates show that the current antidepressants on the

market only work in about 60 percent of patients . If low serotonin levels were really responsible for depression, then increasing serotonin levels should have worked on 100 percent of patients.

There is the added problem of evidence. If low serotonin levels were responsible for depressed mood, then we should be able to induce depression in people by decreasing serotonin, and we should find low levels of serotonin in patients with depression. But neither of those things exists.

Decreasing serotonin in humans can adversely affect mood, but it doesn't always work that way. And studies looking for low serotonin in depressed patients have been inconclusive. It appears that even though antidepressants increase serotonin, a lack of serotonin doesn't necessarily cause depression, which would rule out the theory that low serotonin levels cause depression.

This conclusion asks a big question: has anyone told the FDA and pharmaceutical companies this?

So, what does cause depression?

The short answer is that the 'experts' just don't know; even the World Health Organization doesn't have an answer. But those of us who've suffered from depression often have a good idea. We have an instinct for what's wrong and, if we dig deep, we can always find the answer.

## CHAPTER 6

# ANTIDEPRESSANTS AND THEIR SIDE EFFECTS

**L**et's take a closer look at exactly what side effects we can expect as a result of taking these drugs..

Firstly, they have been found to damage physical health. One review published in 2008 found that 86 percent of patients experienced at least one of the following: liver damage, abnormal bleeding, weight gain, sexual dysfunction, insomnia, fatigue and/or reduced cognitive function.

But the author, Dr. Kelly Brogan, (a highly educated psychiatrist who has written extensively about an integrated approach to depression including her best selling book 'A Mind Of Your Own') is more concerned that "antidepressants have repeatedly been shown in long-term scientific studies to worsen the course of mental illness – to say nothing of the risks of what they entail."

Another review of antidepressants' side effects found that a whopping 86 percent of patients experienced at least one such side effect .

Ironically, one notorious side effect is related to suicide. This is so well documented that following lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies for hiding data, it was shown that an excess of suicides occurred with every antidepressant licensed since 1987 when compared with a placebo. In 2004, the FDA forced companies to carry a black-box warning that said antidepressants "increase the risk of suicidal thinking and behavior in children, adolescents and young adults".

The secondary problem is the 'addiction' to antidepressants. One common question is, "How do you cease your dependence on them?"

Some people I know have spent tens of thousands of. Brogan says that psychiatry's "dirtiest little secret of all" is the fact that antidepressants are more addictive and more difficult to get off of than alcohol or opiates.

The Handbook of Chronic Depression describes this 'discontinuation syndrome' as the result of short-acting agents, or abruptly stopping the drugs. It causes flu-like symptoms such as malaise, muscle pain, nausea, dizziness, headache and sometimes neurological symptoms (like wobbliness, burning or tingling on just a touch to the skin), tremulousness and vertigo. 5

"The drugs create chemical imbalances in the brain, and this helps turn a first-time customer into a long-term user, and often into a buyer of multiple drugs," says Robert Whitaker, acclaimed author of *Anatomy of an Epidemic* (Crown, 2010). "At the same time," he says, "since psychiatric drugs perturb normal function, they regularly cause physical and psychiatric problems, and this greases the path to polypharmacy."

So, someone feeling depressed is prescribed antidepressants, and then needs something to help her sleep at night. Having witnessed the devastating impact of this paradigm on hundreds of her patients, Brogan urges women to find out if they are really mentally ill or if what's ailing them is possibly something else: what toxins are wreaking havoc with their hormones? Is their food nourishing them, or fanning inflammation and sapping energy and nutrients? Are there lifestyle factors that contribute to the problem, and what can be done about them?



## DEPRESSIONCURES:

What Your Doctor Won't Tell You

While factors like grief and trauma can definitely tip emotional scales, we are equipped to recover from life events. But when we don't, or when depression creeps into our lives, Brogan suggests looking at hormones, especially those from the butterfly-shaped thyroid gland at the base of the neck—which produces hormones that regulate metabolism and play a role in immunity, detoxification and cognition—and insulin, the hormone that regulates our blood sugar levels.

## CHAPTER 7

# SOME TRUTHS ABOUT WHAT DEPRESSION IS NOT

### 1. Depression is Not caused by A Chemical imbalance of the brain

The predominant myth about depression is that it's caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. As we've already discussed, this is not true and I defy anyone to find any evidence supporting this theory. What is so shocking is that this theory is what most drug treatments are based on.

What is true is that there is a definite reduction in the amount of certain neurotransmitters found (monoamines such as serotonin and norepinephrine) in depressed people. So it is fair to say that having depression causes an imbalance of brain chemicals. To say that depression is caused by the imbalance of brain chemicals is inaccurate.

### 2. Anti-depressants are not the most effective treatment for depression

Pharmaceutical companies have marketed their products as the 'go to' quick fix for depression. How can that be when there is no evidence to support the theory that depression is about a series of neurotransmissions in the brain?

Sadly, for the consumer, the FDA whole-heartedly approves the pharmaceutical companies' answer to treating depression. In fact, the standard the FDA requires for psychiatric meds to be approved and sold to consumers is not a high one: only two independent studies that yield significant results in favor of drugs is required,

regardless of how many trials may be required to render such findings. In other words, “so long as research eventually yields evidence of efficacy, the failures would remain off the books. This is why antidepressants have been approved even though so many studies have shown them to be ineffective” (Greenberg, 2010, p. 216).

Furthermore, Greenberg also suggests in his findings that the reduction of depressive symptoms seen with antidepressant use may be more symptomatic of a placebo effect than the merits of the drug itself. My own theory on this is that when someone is chosen to be a part of a study, the attention they might receive may be enough to help them feel better.

I know for myself that when someone was interested in how I was and how I was coping with the depression, my mood improved dramatically.

The very nature of depression is feeling isolated. So when you go to the doctor for help, how much of the improvement in mood can be attributed to the attention the doctor gives you? I know for me, having a doctor hear how depressed I was gave me a sense that there was some help out there, which raised my outlook on life. So, if I also got a pack of pills, would I attribute feeling better to the pills, or having felt that another human being heard my distress?

Ironically, the use of antidepressants can actually increase suicidal thoughts among teenagers. In my mind, not enough is done to flag the concerning side effects of antidepressants. This is the role of the FDA and it could be argued that it's not doing its job by taking the pharmaceutical industry to task.

### **3. Depression is not a mental illness, disorder or disease**

Now this may shock you because the medical profession will tell you that depression is an illness, which is the result of an imbalance

of brain chemicals caused by a halt in the proper production of neurotransmitters. This theory is often presented in the media as fact, even though there is little scientific evidence to support it. In spite of there being no solid research, doctors prescribe millions of antidepressants each day solely based on this assumption of illness, which we are inclined to believe and therefore take the antidepressants without asking too many questions, because we feel so depressed.

But something here just isn't working because the rates of depression are going through the roof. One recent survey suggested that a third of all women in the U.S. take anti-depressants at some point!

The question we must ask is: How is depression an illness of the mind?

The medical profession believes that depression is a biologically based illness that is 'a chemical imbalance in the brain.' It was thought that too much or too little of essential signal-transmitting chemicals—neurotransmitters—were present in the brain. Treatments were developed to keep neurotransmitters (such as serotonin) within the tiny gaps called synapses between adjacent nerve cells, where signals are exchanged. By preventing specific neurotransmitters from being reabsorbed into nerve cells, the theory went, the signals between cells would be boosted and mood would be lifted. The most popular antidepressant medications were developed to function in this manner.

However, let's focus on where depression sits. It doesn't sit in the brain but in the emotions. When people discuss the depression they talk about feeling numb, dark, heavy, sad, angry, dull, anxious, dragged down, pessimistic etc. None of these conditions come from the brain; they are all states of emotion.



## DEPRESSION CURES:

What Your Doctor Won't Tell You

Depression is not stuck in the head. Depression is an emotional imbalance. It evolves as a result of broken dreams, stuffed emotions, consistent denial, and chronic use of stimulants to run away from feelings, when all hope has gone and been replaced with inner turmoil.

When I was in the depths of despair I would have loved to have had 'an illness' or a 'chemical imbalance' because that would have made life so simple. To be able to say that I had 'contracted' something meant all I had to do was take a pill to fix it. But, depression isn't fixable with a pill. Medication cannot straighten out the lines of tangled hopes and dreams, broken relationships and a belief that we will never be whole again.

## CHAPTER 8

# SO WHAT EXACTLY IS DEPRESSION?

There is no one-way to describe depression. It is different for everybody. Here are some descriptions from people who suffer with depression and what it means to them.

"My depression is at a level now that I feel lifeless, that's probably the best way to describe it. I have no energy, feel numb and as if I'm in a dream every day. I hate myself for being like this. I feel a lot of pain (not physical, well, not always) even with just thinking. It's all I do. Think about the past... and I don't enjoy life. I never have. Happiness is another thing I don't understand. It's foreign to me. I feel like an empty shell. No emotion any more. The only feeling is pain. I see no way forward." *Mike*

"I feel like the most hated person in the world at the moment, my self-esteem is at an all-time low. I often feel that if I weren't here, nobody would be bothered. I am very tearful and have been in the supermarket doing my weekly shop and nearly burst into tears. I am a very nervous person and lack confidence. I am praying that there will be a light at the end of the tunnel; I hate the feeling that everyone hates me at work. I'm thinking of looking for another job so I don't have to go back and face anyone." *Sharon*

"I feel so messed up! I feel like I'm trapped in a bubble. I feel so lonely, tearful and don't want to face anyone. When my family is around I have to act as normal as I can, as I don't want to put any worries on them. I have to walk out of the room and weep, as I don't want them worrying." *Richard*

"I have suffered from very bad mood swings all my life but now they are taking over. One day I will be in the best mood ever and

want to do erratic things like work abroad and the next I am so down I think about suicide. I am pushing my family away, but not intentionally. It's gotten to a point where my own mum is afraid to talk to me because she doesn't know how I will react, whether I will be nice or completely flip out." *Deborah*

"I am petrified to speak to a doctor. How are you supposed to tell them you don't know what's wrong with you? I feel embarrassed. I have huge barriers up against everyone. People think I am a lovely, bubbly person, but a smile can hide everything." *Vicky*

## **My Personal Definition of Depression**

Wikipedia defines depression as a 'state of low mood'. Whoa! Has anyone at Wikipedia ever suffered from depression? Obviously not!

Depression can be described as a state of low mood only at its very best. I will describe what depression was like for me; maybe this will resonate for you, too.

Depression was a life-zapper, an end of life, as I knew it. Depression tore away piece-by-piece my hopes and dreams, deconstructing my ability to maintain good relationships and creating a helplessness and hopelessness of the very, very deepest kind. It manifested itself as a dark, brooding cloud that settled on my chest and moved its way up and down until it filled the whole cavity of my existence so that I couldn't see further than my nose. It then took me down into a bottomless black pit into which no light could enter and from where there seemed no escape. It robbed me of my self-esteem and all motivation to change. It found ways of telling me how useless I'd been in the past and told me that there was no hope for the future.

Once I'd reached the bottom of the pit, the depression told me I was worth nothing more. Then it positively encouraged self-hate to the point where I acted out to stop the pain. In my case, I became

a workaholic, but there are lots of different tools to try: for some people it may be drugs, smoking, alcoholic bingeing, spending money you don't have, self-harm, dangerous sexual relationships, sugar and junk food bingeing, acting-out violence, abusiveness and self-neglect.

The cycle of depression and self-harm:

*Depression – self-hate – self-harm – more depression – more self-hate –  
more self-harm – more depression.*

The more we hate ourselves for feeling depressed, the more we act out to try to stop the pain by indulging in behavior which perpetuates the depression and causes more pain. It becomes an endless loop.

## Why We Are So Depressed?

For the last 70 years, the world of psychology has been obsessed with the idea of 'mental illnesses'. Billions, no trillions, of dollars have been invested in trying to find out why we suffer this 'disorder' in such large numbers and why the rates of 'mental illness' are soaring phenomenally.

Depression has been sub-categorized into new 'illnesses' such as melancholic depression, bipolar depression, dysthymic disorder, major depression, post-partum depression and seasonal affective disorder. There are at least 14 'mental illnesses', all of which have a medication blueprint of 'effective treatment'.

The truth is that in spite of all the money spent on research, no medical authority can confidently answer the basic question: why are so many of us depressed?

As a person who has recovered from depression, this is how I see it. Depression happens when we deny our real, authentic selves. It's the psyche's way of dealing with situations that we find difficult

or maybe impossible to manage. It's what happens when we can't stand up for ourselves and use our natural resources to move on. It's what overcomes us when we have lost sight of our dreams or when we can't see a way to escape from a tight spot. Depression settles on our soul when we have given up on ourselves. It's like a blanket that numbs out the pain, but in the process it also numbs out the joy. Perhaps modern life has taken its toll and drastically increased the numbers of depressed people. It's not hard to fathom. In the last 50 years we:

- Eat more processed food
- Sit down more
- Exercise less
- Spend more time indoors – less sunlight
- Eat more sugar
- Drink more alcohol
- Have less community
- Have become dependent on technology for personal connections
- Yet feel more isolated
- Have higher expectations of life
- Compare ourselves more to others

If nothing else has taken place except these eleven changes, that's enough to create a disheartened generation.

## CHAPTER 9

# UP THE NEW MEDICINE

Things are changing, in that there are new ways to treat depression. Studies are being undertaken to demonstrate that you can beat, even cure, depression without pharmaceutical drugs. Of course, these are not cures that your doctor will discuss with you because they are trained to look at pharmaceutical interventions to treat depression. But here, we will look at how you can implement new strategies to help you address and uplift your mood.

In a study published by the British Medical Journal , researchers established that therapy is far more effective than drugs in the treatment of depression, and without the range of side effects and reactions that endanger the health of the patient.

### **Two self-help therapies.**

For the sake of this book, let's identify two areas that perpetuate depression once it's taken hold, and discuss things we can do to make an immediate difference: First, it presses down emotions. Secondly, it makes us over-think.

Let's look at each of these in turn.

#### **1. Not expressing emotions healthily**

The very word 'de-pressed' suggests that something is being held down. We are depressed because we have pushed down emotions that we can't allow to come to the surface. We constantly experience a range of emotions; how we handle them determines the level of our emotional health. If we feel angry but don't express that anger

in a healthy way, we will either act it out in ways that might be harmful to us, or we will ignore it and 'de-press' it. If we feel sad but don't let it out, we hold back the tears until they are also 'depressed down'.

## **2. Over-thinking**

Over-thinking is the second thing that makes us depressed. What is over-thinking? Another term for it is rumination. It's the tendency to go over and over things in the mind like a record that's stuck in a groove and keeps repeating the same sequence. It's replaying an argument or retracing the past in an obsessive way. Research has found that this habit makes us emphasize the negative things that happened to us in the past and interpret current situations in our lives more negatively. We become so preoccupied with our problems that we're unable to push past the negative thoughts.

We all face adversity, and the way we deal with it was taught to us as children. When our life is going well, we don't question the way we tick. But when we hit a bad patch, if we don't have a compassionate, in-built method of dealing with life's messiness and, by default, we ignore our natural response; we can easily fall into a depressive state. We weren't born depressed (unless our mother was addicted to alcohol or a drug that requires going through lengthy withdrawal symptoms and this didn't happen to most of us) so something happened to us to start the depression. Part of the recovery from depression is finding out what happened so we can change it.

## **Depression needs our help to hang around**

The strange thing about depression is if we let it take its natural course, we would recover in good time. Depression is a temporary state. If we let our natural resilience move us through the process, we would come out on the other side and recover. Generally, we

don't accept the depression as a part of a natural cycle; we try to outrun it. But in trying to outrun it, we make it bigger than it needs to be.

Depression is both socially unacceptable and painful. We do things to try and keep it away from us. We try to escape it by 'getting on' with our lives. It's called 'running on empty' - we try to keep ourselves going although we don't have enough fuel to do so. Because we feel like emotional cripples, we have to use crutches to keep us going. We 'numb' our feelings with high sugar/fat food, alcohol, cigarettes, work, shopping, compulsive sex or exercise, drugs or anything else that keeps us functioning at some level. It's easy to find ways of keeping the lid on our emotions. If we do this for long enough, depression becomes 'normal'.

Once we're stuck in the day-to-day blackness, it can seem impossible to find a way out. Instead of outrunning the depression, somehow it overtakes and outruns us.

### **Seeing depression another way: how it can help us**

When all else fails, depression can feel like a comfort blanket. At least we know what it is and we know that when we're in a full bout of depression we can give up on ourselves. If you've suffered from depression for a long time, it can become a 'default position'. It can seem comforting to return to that hopeless, helpless place when life feels too hard and messy. When I was in this state I understood the mess I was getting myself into when I gave up and sank back into the pit of depression; but there were benefits . . . better the devil you know, I thought! And because 'hopelessness' is one of the pillars of depression, I also felt hopeless about ever recovering from it, which kept me locked in the depression cycle.

But what if the depression you're suffering can actually help you? In the same way that physical pain signals an injury which needs

to be treated, depression can signal some life changes which need to be put in place. If you feel your knee is hurting it can mean you need to take a break from your running workout and rest up until it recovers. Likewise, suffering from depression can mean that something in your life isn't working or that you need to take a step back and re-assess what needs to be addressed. What important advantages could the depression be conferring?

Being depressed certainly backs you into a corner, but here you may also discover solitude, time and space. It might take you away from distressing or futile situations and allow you a little breathing space. This pause offers you a chance to get a fresh view on life and perhaps prevents you from making rash decisions, or it can give you time to re-assess relationships.

Certainly for me, tackling the depression took me to a new place. Obviously I felt better because I recovered from the depressive symptoms, but the process also transformed me. The depression signaled that something was seriously wrong and needed working through and then changing. I was able to break out of a mold that had been imposed on me. It helped me discover who I truly was, which added much more meaning to my life. From the pit of depression I was able to find that deep space which increased my creativity and purpose. I could see that I wasn't a failure. But I had taken on too much and something inside said, 'enough is enough'.

The depression looked after me while I was able to explore the reasons why I was trying to fight the world. I could have swept the turmoil under the carpet and gone on up the career ladder, but it was the depression that helped me to lie low. It taught me to take care of the important things in life – good relationships, self-love, living in today and developing compassion. I became more honest and truthful, especially to myself. I had to find courage to face some of these life truths, like how much I wanted to control those around me (probably the hardest bit of the journey) and also how much I



relied on others to give me a sense of self-worth – such a painful place to be!

If I hadn't had the courage to find my own way through depression and I'd gone down the medical route, I would have believed I was simply suffering from a chemical imbalance in my brain. This would have been a disservice to me. I knew that popping a pill was not the answer. I would never have had the opportunities to recognize and address life-changing problems or had the chance to fulfill my potential or had the opportunity to develop an appreciation of the world around me like I have now.



PART TWO

# DEPRESSION CURES

## CHAPTER 10 CHANGE YOUR DIET

A new study from the University of Las Palmas in the Canary Islands has concluded that depression is actually a nutritional deficiency and the Mediterranean Diet-rich in fruits, vegetables and nuts-is one of the best ways of preventing depression.

IResearchers of the study tracked the health and diets of 15,000 participants who were all healthy at the start of the 10-year study. During the course of the trial, around 10 percent were diagnosed with clinical depression or began taking an antidepressant drug. The study notes a strong correlation between those who were depressed and the type of diet they were on. They concluded that those who ate a healthy diet rich in fruits and vegetables were far less likely to suffer from depression.

Can the answer to depression really lie in food? Yes it can.

You may have been told to go out and socialize, get drunk and have a good time. But that could make you feel worse. What they didn't tell you was that feeling good could lie in some pretty special foods that don't mean spending your way out of depression. These are dynamic 'depression fighting' foods that have specific properties to stimulate certain hormones and fan the flames of happiness.

We've often seen the female lead in a romantic comedy drowning her sorrows in a tub of ice cream or a guy hitting the bar when he's feeling down. But there's a downside to doing so, and here's what happens:

### The Food / Depression Cycle



When we feel depressed it's easy to tuck into a bag of sweets or a plate of chocolate biscuits because they raise our blood sugar levels and seem to give us a 'lift'. After a short time, however, our blood sugar levels will suddenly drop, leaving us feeling grumpy, fatigued and craving more sugar. This is because the pancreas secretes high amounts of insulin to prevent a dangerous spike in blood sugar levels. The only way out seems to be to have another couple of biscuits or a lie down!

The current understanding about the happiness/depression food connection starts with the 'emotional chemicals' and how they affect the brain. The very act of eating food produces brain chemicals that make us feel warm and satisfied. These chemicals are called neurotransmitters. Their function is to send messages from one nerve cell to another within the brain and they influence thought, functions and feelings. These chemicals are made in the brain from the food we eat and are highly sensitive to food. In fact, they get all their nutrients from the food we eat so if we don't eat the right foods, our brain can't help but under-perform.



This chapter will help you identify if your diet is contributing to your depression. It then looks at which foods can help beat depression and which foods you should try to give up if you want to beat depression faster.

### **Is your diet making you depressed?**

If you're not sure whether the food you eat is affecting your emotions, here's a simple questionnaire that will get you thinking about how much your diet may be contributing to how you feel. Score yourself in the boxes on the right and review the results as explained on the next page.



## DEPRESSION CURES:

What Your Doctor Won't Tell You

<i>Question</i>	<i>Every day – 3 points</i>	<i>2/3 times a week – 2 points</i>	<i>Rarely – 1 point</i>
Do you eat more than one high sugar snack e.g. piece of cake or a couple of biscuits?			
Do you have more than one small alcoholic drink?			
Do you eat less than two portions of fresh fruit or vegetables a day?			
Do you feel tired after you have eaten a meal?			
Do you drink less than two glasses of water?			
Do you rely on convenience foods for your main meals?			
Do you eat in front of the television?			
Do you suffer from headaches after eating?			
Do you grab some snack food when you are hungry?			
How often do you go without a piece of fresh fruit?			
How often do you eat fried foods?			
Do you feel bloated after eating a meal?			
Do you ever feel depressed about the food you eat?			
Do you keep breaking promises to yourself about eating better?			
Do you ever miss breakfast?			
How often do you go through the day on snacks rather than 3 meals a day?			
Do you feel depressed after eating?			
How often do you skip main meals?			
Do you eat high salt foods, e.g. a bag of crisps/ nuts?			
How often do you eat takeaway meals?			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

## Scoring

1–20 your eating habits are generally healthy; it is unlikely that your diet is depressing your mood. You are not allowing too much processed food into your diet.

21–40 your diet is probably contributing to your depression. You may have erratic eating habits which could exacerbate stress, and when you get stressed, you may find yourself relying on quick-energy foods that may not be contributing to your overall well being by leaving you feeling hungry more often.

41–60 your diet is unbalanced, which means you are probably eating high amounts of salt/sugar/saturated fats, all of which definitely contribute to depression. If you feel depressed you may find yourself turning to processed foods for comfort and these kinds of foods can create a 'numbing out' effect and cause you to lose mental focus and clarity. Once you find yourself in this vicious cycle, your craving for highly processed foods becomes strong and it can become hard to break the habit. There is a high probability that changing your food will change your mood.

## Which dynamic foods beat depression?

One recommendation for nourishing our bodies to boost our mood is to implement the 'five a day' rule. Scientific studies from the World Health Organization recommend eating a minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. Fruits and vegetables help to protect us from illnesses that take time to develop. What we eat now will affect our health in twenty years' time – the time taken for some illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer, to develop. A portion is as much as we can hold in our hand.

It's a double-edged sword: our immune system is weakened by chronic stress, which is a symptom of depression – but continued

suppression of the immune system can lead to illness. People who are ill are more likely to feel lethargic and debilitated, and lethargy and debilitation can lead to depression. By way of contrast, happy people make for healthy people.

One study has shown that feeling good reduces the risk of disease. 'There's a direct link between how we're feeling and the biological processes which relate to illness and illness risk,' said Dr. Andrew Steptoe, the British Heart Foundation Professor of Psychology at University College, London. 'Biology is going to be on the side of those people who are going to be in a more positive state of mind, and it may well stand these people in good stead for their future health.'

By making sure we keep ourselves healthier, we are helping ourselves stay happier. In fact, the evidence shows that eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day has very real health benefits – it could help prevent up to 20 percent of deaths from our nation's biggest killers – heart disease and some cancers.

## **Six key nutrients to help beat depression**

Let's look at a list of six key nutrients for helping to fight depression, and where to find them.

### **Tryptophan**

Foods rich in the amino acid tryptophan facilitate the body's uptake of the wonderful neurotransmitter serotonin. We want plenty of serotonin to feel good and beat depression. High tryptophan foods are:

- Soy products: soymilk, tofu, and soybean nuts
- Seafood
- Turkey
- Whole grains
- Beans
- Rice
- Humus
- Lentils
- Hazelnuts, peanuts
- Eggs
- Sesame seeds, sunflower seeds



## Omega-3

Omega-3 fatty acids are another type of compound, which has been proven to lift depression. This important nutrient is critical for good health. Omega-3 compounds are a form of polyunsaturated fats, one of four basic types of fat that the body derives from food. All polyunsaturated fats, including the omega-3s, are increasingly recognized as important to human health but the body cannot produce them, which means they need to be provided by our diet. A lack of Omega-3 mood-boosting nutrients may lead to depression and other mental health problems.

Here is a list of the gorgeous Omega-3 fat sources:

- Fish • Canola oil • Olive oil • Flaxseed oil • Walnuts • Venison

return Folic acid is also a brilliant depression fighter and research shows that people with low levels of folic acid are more like to suffer from depression. Scientists at the UK Medical Research Council recommend plenty of folic acid daily as a preventative measure for depression. Folic acid is a water-soluble vitamin and the body can't retain it for long, with any excess being expelled in the urine. This means that any of us could be deficient in folic acid at any one time; it is a hard vitamin to keep in the body. Eating some of these foods will help keep your levels high:

- Beetroot • Spinach • Broccoli • Avocados • Asparagus • Dried beans • Brussels sprouts

## Magnesium

Magnesium deficiency has been strongly linked to depressive symptoms. It is necessary for the absorption of calcium and is the primary mineral required by the adrenal glands to help the body cope with stress. Increasing your magnesium levels could help with muscle cramps; sleep problems, fatigue and depression. Eat some of



these foods to add magnesium to your diet return:

- Spinach • Avocados • Barley • Pumpkin seeds • Sunflower seeds • Brazil nuts • Buckwheat, almonds

## **Vitamin B6**

Vitamin B6 is a particularly brilliant vitamin for helping reduce susceptibility to mood changes and is a good mood-enhancer, excellent for irritability, aids good sleep and helps alleviate depression. Foods high in B6 include:

- Sweet potatoes • Wholegrain • Tofu • Nuts
- Seeds • Pulses • Avocados • Apricots • Asparagus

This is called the sunlight vitamin because the body produces it when the sun's ultraviolet B (UVB) rays strike the skin. It is the only vitamin the body manufactures naturally and is technically considered a hormone. Vitamin D has been a key nutrient to help Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) sufferers and one study found that people with SAD who received increased amounts of Vitamin D achieved a significant improvement in depression symptoms – albeit after one month. Foods high in Vitamin D are:

- Prawns • Milk • Cod • Eggs

Vitamin D supplements are cheap and easy to obtain and a wise investment for helping beat depression.

Yes, but...

I know; all this good advice doesn't cut the mustard when you're so depressed you can't be bothered to even care about healthy food, even if it is going to make you feel ten times better. However, food affects our mood. That's the bottom line!

Even though we all know that when we are depressed comfort eating is sometimes the only answer, it's even more important that we take a look at this issue when our heads are just enough above water so that we can get a little perspective on the way we eat. There is plenty of medical advice available on what to eat and what not to eat, and it is often conflicting. We are bombarded through the media on the way we should eat and that leads to eating the wrong foods, which can lead to illness and bad health.

The problem is that when we feel depressed, do we care? No, we don't! When we feel so depressed that we want to end it all, what's in our fridge is of little importance to us. For those of us that can munch a packet of chocolate cookies in ten minutes, we also know if there's one thing worse than feeling depressed, it is feeling sick and depressed.

However, if you are trying to climb back up out of a spiral of depression, you have to pay attention to what you put into your mouth. Certain foods can exacerbate depression. For instance eating a lot of cheese, crisps, ice cream, white bread, cakes, biscuits, coffee, alcohol and smoking can make you feel dreadful for at least a couple of days. So you need to attend to the menu.

Planning ahead is the key. Shop accordingly so it is clear what you're going to eat. It becomes second nature, almost clinical, to get out the food that's been prepared earlier. Include goodies and treats, but make sure the basics are included. I generally find that following these two rules I can keep my focus on good food:

1. Five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
2. Eat three meals a day and nothing in between.

It's easy to get into a cycle that goes round and round when we are depressed. You don't care what you put in your mouth that makes you feel worse and then you care even less. Sometimes just being

aware of the link between feeling awful and your eating pattern can be enough to spur you into action. So long as you have that awareness, the seed will germinate and grow in time.

You will also feel much better about yourself when you eat well. Eating junk is part of the self-perpetuating abuse that we pour on ourselves when we have little self-worth. It's easier to fall into the victim mentality when we don't look after ourselves and then blame everyone else for not looking after us. Changing our food is a tiny step towards beating depression.

My one food tip – soup! And homemade is best. A great recipe, which is simple and quick:

1. Soften 1 onion and two sticks of celery in a pan with some olive oil.
2. Add 1 tin tomatoes, 1 tablespoon tomato puree, 2 cloves garlic, 1 tin cannellini beans and a pint of stock.
3. Simmer for 30 minutes then add herbs to taste (oregano is lovely).
4. Add grated cheese to serve if you wish.

This soup is nutritious and comforting and hits the spot every time.

## CHAPTER 11 SURRENDER

When you are in a full depression, there is just no point in trying to fight it. It is like riding a bicycle with a flat tyre. Every 10 minutes you have to get off and pump it only to find that the tyre is flat minutes later. You are better off just accepting the status quo instead of fighting what you can't win. The harsh words we tell ourselves are akin to falsely pumping up the tyre again, only to feel deflated seconds later. 'What's wrong with you?' 'Get yourself together you idiot' 'You're a useless piece of shit!' are words that won't help. Just stop, breathe out, and notice the release of tension in your stomach. Accept the depression for that moment. Know that you are depressed and, just for that moment, you are completely powerless to change it.

This acceptance will bring you sense of relief. It will calm you down in the knowledge that you don't have to sort it out today. You can just relax and sit with the feeling of being depressed. It is not self-indulgent; it is honest. You are entitled to feel depressed if that is how you feel. You can still function and be depressed. Being depressed does not mean you are going to die; it means you feel depressed. You can cope with that for one day at a time, one hour at a time, one minute at a time. You are not a freak, you are not unnatural, you are not worthless – you are simply depressed.

You are better off surrendering to your depression than trying to fight it. Like pushing wet sand, the more you push, the harder it gets. Surrendering means actually putting your arms in the air and saying, 'I surrender.' Go on – try it. Just do it. You will feel the difference as you do it and you will feel some acceptance of your current state.

Examples of how to surrender are as follows:

You must prepare well for this. You need time to yourself. It does not need to be all day, but it needs to be at least an hour a day. However, the more time you get to yourself, the better. You don't have to be on your own but you need to have little or no responsibility during your hour.

Once this is organized, you must become aware of your duties for the week and cut them down to the bare minimum. If you have a job, take time off. If you have children, organize your routine as best you can to get as much time off as possible. You may feel finding time is too much bother, but also bear in mind how long you have been depressed and ask yourself how much longer you want to stay depressed.

At some point we have to surrender to the fact that we have depression and that we feel powerless over it. This is because we have tried everything to change the way we feel and little has worked. For now we admit we are powerless over our depression and we submit to our feelings. When depression arrives it is as if it came out of nowhere. We don't understand how it got there or what we can do to make it go away. Depression appears to have a life of its own and we feel immobilized when it's around.

It is vital for our recovery that we completely indulge in our feelings so that we feel saturated. This is because we have never allowed ourselves to totally experience the despair and hopelessness that comes with depression and this the goal of surrendering. We usually judge ourselves harshly for our state of mind, but this time it is for acceptance of ourselves. This may be the most difficult part of beating depression because we have never allowed ourselves to completely indulge in our despair. Stick with the simplicity of allowing yourself the time out to surrender to your depression and despair.



Every day do the following:

- Sink into your depression
- Let go of trying to control your feelings
- Stop trying not to be depressed
- Don't soldier on any more
- Look down towards the floor and feel the weight on your shoulders
- Feel the despair and hopelessness
- Feel the unfairness and self-pity
- If tears rise to the surface, let them out
- Ask no questions
- Indulge in your melancholy – you have permission to do so
- Feel the anger if it rises to the surface
- Let out your anger if it feels right
- Take time off – get a sick note
- Concentrate on you and no one else
- Catch a virus, stay in bed, damn the world
- Reel with the self admission that you are depressed
- Make no big decisions
- Abdicate as much responsibility as much as you can
- Shelve your projects
- Abandon your duties
- Suspend self-criticism for your surrendering
- Don't get bored – you have waited a long time for this moment – use it well.

Don't read anymore until this period has finished. Put this book away except to re-read the instruction above. It is time to completely let go.

But, don't be afraid of what might happen; you won't lose more control than you have lost already. Good things will come from this stage. If you feel worse than you have ever felt before, it is because the feelings you have been running from are surfacing. But, it is more



exhausting to be constantly running than it is to STOP, turn around and face what you have been running from. You use up far more energy running away than turning around to face the unknown, because when you run you have to contend with the exhaustion of running in addition to dealing with the fear of the unknown!

When I had a breakdown caused by depression, it was the running away from the problem and the feeling of fear associated with accepting the fact that I was depressed that wore me down. Once I had begun to accept that I was depressed, I stopped betraying myself and sought help. This was the beginning of the road to recovery.

Whilst you undertake these ideas you may get a sense that your depression is not as great as you thought. It's the pushing away from the depression that can make it seem overwhelming. Like in so many areas of our life, when we don't allow ourselves to face something we are afraid of, whatever it is we are afraid of can seem so much bigger than it is. The only way to learn this lesson is to face the threat, and no one can do this for us.

However, each time we face our worst fear, we grow in our stamina to do it again and our courage will increase. Depression can feel like the most frightening thing to face because it can feel like we're falling into a big, black, bottomless pit in which we may disappear and never resurface. The reality is, our fear of depression creates the black hole, not the depression itself. As time goes on, you will notice a foundation to the black pit and as you further recover, the black pit will become more and more shallow until one day you will forget you were ever in a black pit at all.

## CHAPTER 12

# GET ANGRY/CRY

Depression holds down stuck feelings. Either you feel you don't want to face those feelings, or you can't face them. Why? Because you think it would be too painful, and if you start to cry or get angry, you will never stop – and you don't want to feel out of control. The feelings may be so painful that staying depressed is preferable.

However, you have a tremendous inner reserve. Your spirit will not allow you to lose control. You will only release the feelings you can handle. If you begin to cry, you will stop when your essence has had enough. If you let out the rage, you will become exhausted before you lose control. You will only be given what you can handle. You will only receive what you can manage. Your mind will only expend what it deems safe to expend.

You will only be given what you feel is safe to let out. This is the natural human evolution. You have to trust yourself and push forward, because the central pivot to beating depression is to release those feelings. One person I counseled told me, 'When I was going through the mill, I had great concerns that I was, in fact, going mad, and that serious damage would be done to my brain. Crazy, I know. However, I was told that, and I learned this simply would not happen, as exhaustion would set in well beforehand.'

To help yourself get ahold of the sadness or rage, imagine the feeling as you see it. What color is it? Where does it sit in your body? What shape is it? I had always seen my sadness and rage as a solid grey concrete block that sat on the top of my chest. The effect it had on me was to drain me, pull me down, and leave me feeling listless, heavy and hopeless, because it seemed an impossible weight to carry. By seeing the feeling, you will start to see it as it is – a finite sensation

that can be dealt with – not an unidentified object you are unable to cope with.

As you cry or rage, the enormity of the feelings will subside.

## RELEASE ANGER

Anger that is not dealt with in childhood can develop into depression in adulthood. It can also develop into abuse of self and others, which leads to mayhem. I believe that behind every man and woman in jail for violent behavior lies a part of them that is in deep pain. Childhood abuse creates abusive adults. Unexpressed anger can be very dangerous – to both us and others – as the suppressed anger comes out as rage. We have to move on from our childhood rage in order to develop into competent and happy adults, but this is not easy.

Many of us deny that we are angry, but if we are depressed, we have hidden our anger. We are not encouraged to express this emotion – especially as children – and we are not taught how to release it. But every one of us is angry about something, and unchecked anger can lead us into situations we would choose not to be in if we thought about them rationally. If we are angry and do not deal with that anger, it will land on top of the angry heap inside us. It doesn't just go away; it accumulates.

## HERE IS A CHECKLIST FOR HIDDEN ANGER:

- Chronic pain in the neck or jaw
- Sarcasm
- Ironic humor
- Boredom, apathy, disinterest
- Nightmares
- Smiling when you don't want to
- Controlling your voice
- Grinding your teeth at night

- Becoming irritated at irrelevant things
- Body tics or spasmodic movements that you are unaware of
- Stomach ulcers
- Constant cheerfulness and 'grin and bear it' attitude
- Refusing eye contact
- Clenching a thumb in a fist
- Over-politeness
- Not sleeping or sleeping too much
- Frustration at everything around you
- A feeling of one's life not being good enough

If you don't recognize any of these signals in yourself, ask people close to you if they recognize any of them. Ask them how they can tell when you are upset about something. Just hear their response without sinking into a pit of shame. Take it as good information. It is normal to deny that we are angry because that's the way our society is. When someone is angry, others often look at them and say, 'Ooh, what's wrong with her?' It isn't generally accepted that releasing anger is a path to freedom. But it is. So you must find yours. At this point you have to take it in blind faith that if you are depressed, you have repressed anger.

Put an hour aside for yourself and sit somewhere quiet and safe. Begin to write about what angers you. Make a list of at least ten things – you will begin to see a common theme. Whatever your common theme is, allow yourself to indulge in the fury that accompanies your list. My lists usually encircle one main problem in my life. The ten things on your list will guide you towards your object of vehemence. Forget yourself as the nice, polite grown-up and see yourself as a screaming unreasonable toddler who has had enough.

If you need to take action to dispel the anger, thump the pillow, run it out, throw rocks in the sea, or scream your head off. Do something that dissipates the energy you feel. Let it all out and contain the fear that you will get out of control – you won't. Don't be afraid of your

anger because it is very power-full. Use it for your good. Move it into determination, resolve and purpose. Make it work for you to bring about change.

After you have done this you will feel more in control. You will feel a sense of calm and you may feel the pain that is buried beneath the anger. If you don't, then stick with identifying what angers you, because you are not sated yet. Don't worry – the pain will surface when you have made the room inside you.

Some of us possess a rage that is so fierce we are scared to touch it. If you recognize this in yourself, it would be advisable to find a professional practitioner to assist you in releasing the rage in a way that will not be harmful to you or anyone else. The section 'Get Help' can assist you in finding someone. If you are aware that this rage sits inside you, you are halfway to taking care of yourself, as awareness takes up half of the recovery from depression.

#### RELEASE PAIN

Anger is usually the front end of pain. The angrier we feel, the more pain we hold. We need to let out some of the anger in order to reach the pain. Once some anger has been shifted, the pain will follow. When I have felt anger in an extreme way, it is usually associated with a sense of unfairness or hopelessness, a feeling of futility, 'how dare they', and other such emotions.

Less common is when we feel tears instead of anger. Many people have described crying when they have felt angry, as it seemed the only way to let the anger out. These are 'hard' tears that can be turned into assertion. Those tears belong to the previous section 'Letting out the anger'. In this section we are looking at the 'soft' tears that lie beneath anger.

Again, find yourself some time and a safe place. Begin to write about what you have lost or what you have that is unwanted. Be specific

and honest. Don't worry about what others might think because no one will read your words. Suspend self-judgment for the moment; it is not required. Instead of seeing yourself as a mature adult, visualize yourself as a child and write as a child would write. To further this, you may want to write with a pen held in the hand you don't usually use to write with. This helps to reach your vulnerable spot – the one that's not in control and has no limits. The sense of pain may not happen immediately, but you will be a step further towards reaching it. This has become a lifelong assignment for me, as it helps me to reach the parts that nothing else can.

Allow yourself the gift of expressing your sadness. It won't go away by ignoring it; it will always stay with you until you express it. Indulge in the pain that lies behind the anger. Hold yourself tight as you let the tears out. Let go of the past. The more you let out, the more you will heal. Letting the tears out will free you from being stuck in the past. Imagine tears as the currency of healing – the more you let out, the more you will heal. Tears do not signify weakness; they signify trapped pain.

Allow yourself to mourn what you have lost. Letting out your pain will lead to a state of forgiveness of yourself and others. The more pain you release, the less frightening the feelings will become, and this will allow you to stop running from your fears.

Your sadness may dispel in hours, but for some of us who have suffered from chronic depression, it may be a long progression. What you will be delighted to discover is that it is the road home. Releasing the pain will only bring you closer to your birthright of happiness and contentment.

Don't worry if you don't reach the anger or pain immediately. Remember the attributes of denial and you will understand that your psyche will take you as far as you will go, only opening up the next layer when you are ready.

## CHAPTER 13

# TRUST

**M**e to you: *"Let a greater power into your life."*  
You to me: *"Trust? You have got to be kidding! Trust whom? Who in their right mind trusts anyone? Or anything?"*

When we are dealing with the despair and hopelessness of depression, it's almost impossible to believe that everything's going to turn out OK. Right now, it doesn't feel OK to be so depressed. Depression and self-belief do not go together. You may be too angry to trust in anything or anyone. You may think, if there were anything out there that could help me, I wouldn't be in this space I'm in now! In the dark rooms of depression, trusting that something or someone else can help us is a tall order. Many of us have set ourselves up as the 'something else' or the 'all-knowing one', believing that nothing out there can help us. We have shunned others' help because we think they don't understand how we feel. We feel so ashamed at how needy we are that we can't allow anyone else to see that part of us. We've tried to keep others away by ignoring offers of help. Or we've felt so desperate that we've literally been hanging onto their ankles as they're trying to get out the door.

The thoughts go round and round trying to make sense of the depression. This isolation taps into the mindset that if we try harder, be nicer, ignore our fear, zip up our emotions, beat up that small part of us that's hurting and get on with it, then we can recover from depression. But it doesn't work like that. For me, real change didn't happen until I acknowledged I couldn't beat depression on my own and that I needed to rely on something bigger and wiser than myself. I realized it was pure arrogance on my part to believe I was the most powerful thing in life and that there was nothing more powerful. This step came as a blessed relief as I recognized I could

step back and let something else take up the slack.

This thing, which is bigger and more powerful than me, is very real. I like to call it my higher power, but there are other terms you might prefer – the kingdom of heaven, fate, the future, instinct, God, a collective conscience of a group of people or even a total human collective awareness. Whatever its title, I have found a very real force beyond my conscious mind that has helped me beat depression.

There may be some of you saying, 'Oh yes, hang on a minute – really? I don't think so! I'll believe it when I see it.' This reaction is totally understandable so let me try to explain further. Our higher power will help us to accept the support we badly need from a deeper source or a power greater than our conscious self. Our conscious self is the part of us we know well – the part of us that thinks our way through life. But our higher power is a bigger, wiser part of us, beyond the daily worrying and anxiety of the conscious mind.

Through meditation you can help connect to this still space that is calm and serene. Once you've experienced that calmness you will find that the worries or thoughts that seemed so distressing diminish, and you will create new solutions to problems that perplexed you. Through the regular practice of mindfulness and acceptance you can continue to deepen your connection to your higher power. Once you've taken some small steps and gained some confidence you will see it's always been there for you.

## **It's not religion**

It's not so much that we have to believe in a power greater than us. It's that we come to realize that our over-thinking mind is not the highest power there is. This isn't about religion; it's about spirituality. I believe there is a life spirit that we can learn to trust in – and it's accessible at the still centre we can find when we meditate. Depression is a spiritual dilemma, not a religious deficiency.

As our minds become clearer, we need to release the grip of our conscious control and allow our true spirit to emerge. We can learn to reconnect with that hidden part of us, the part we can turn to knowing that the future will be OK. As our trust in that powerful part of ourselves grows, we learn to lean into the flow of the river rather than swim against it. We can beat depression faster if we let ourselves recognize this higher power.

For some of you, this suggestion might feel frustrating. You may have felt angry at a power greater than you for abandoning you in times of trouble. This is especially true for people who have assigned a list of negative traits to a greater power, such as punishment, shame and guilt. You might think of a greater power as something you were told to respect and pray to when you were a child, but who then disappeared just when you needed him most. You may be angry, with feelings of rejection and desertion. And I know it's hard to see how you can reclaim any faith in there being anything that you can't see or touch being able to help you.

There is a fable about God helping someone in trouble:

A man is on top of a roof during a great flood. Someone comes by in a boat and says 'Get in, get in!' The man on the roof replies, 'No I have faith in God, he will grant me a miracle.'

Later, when the water is up to his waist, another boat comes by and the sailor tells him to get in. The man on the roof responds that he has faith in God and God will give him a miracle. With the water at about chest high, a third boat comes to rescue him, but the man turns down the offer again saying that God will grant him a miracle. With the water at chin height, a helicopter arrives, the crew throws down a ladder and they tell him to get in. Mumbling, with the water in his mouth, he again turns down the request because of his faith in God. He arrives at the gates of heaven with broken faith and says to St. Peter, 'I thought God would grant me a miracle and I have been

let down.' Peter chuckles and responds, 'I don't know what you're complaining about; we sent you three boats and a helicopter.'

Sometimes we can only see in hindsight the help that was available to us and we can miss what we have right at this moment. We don't have to be religious or God-fearing to understand there is a 'God-like' part of us that knows what is right for us and can point us in the right direction.

Let's look at some of the attitudes and behaviors you can begin to explore that may help bring you closer to your inner higher power.

## **Willingness**

Let's start with willingness. Willingness is the opening of the heart to be present and available in your life and accept the changes that are an inevitable part of the journey. Willingness isn't effort – it's being in a state of effortlessness. It's accepting what we must accept to recover from depression. Being willing to be open to the journey is the next step on from acceptance – the step we looked at in the previous chapter. Like opening the door to some dinner guests and welcoming them into your home, regardless of whether you like them or not, willingness is an acknowledgement that you should walk this path no matter who or what turns up.

In practical terms, willingness is letting go of control. Being willing is scary because we're in the unknown. We're not sure how to let go of controlling everything around us to keep ourselves safe. But let's look at this more closely. True willingness is letting go of what you've relied on up until now, and I'm guessing it hasn't been working for you. Perhaps now is the time to try a different approach.

Here's another story that illustrates how we can hang onto old ways of behaving:

A man was being chased by a tiger. He ran as hard as he could until he was at the edge of a cliff with the tiger still in hot pursuit. The man looked over the edge of the cliff and saw a branch growing out of the side of the cliff a few feet down. He jumped down and grabbed the branch just as the tiger reached the edge of the cliff. The tiger growled viciously as the man sighed a great sigh of relief.

Just then, a mouse came out from a crevice and began to chew on the branch. The man looked down at the drop of a thousand feet and sure death and looked to the heavens and yelled out, 'Oh God, if you are there, please help me. I will do anything you ask, but please help!'

Suddenly a voice came booming down from heaven, 'You will do anything I ask?' it questioned.

Shocked to hear a reply to his question, the man yelled back, 'I will gladly do anything you ask, but please save me!'

The voice from heaven then replied, 'There is one way you can be saved, but it will take courage and faith.' The branch began to weaken from the mouse's efforts and the tiger was still growling a few feet above, 'Please, Lord, tell me what I must do and I will do it.'

'Your will is my will,' the voice from heaven said. 'Let go of the branch.' The man looked down to the fall of a thousand feet and certain death. He saw the mouse still chewing on the branch and the hungry tiger a few feet away. Then he looked up at the heavens and screamed, 'Is there anyone else up there?'

Like the man in the fable, when we are depressed we hold onto the branch for dear life, unwilling to let go but begging for help. What kind of branch are you hanging onto? Perhaps it's another person whom you are unwilling to let go of because you're scared of being alone. Perhaps you are hanging onto a lifestyle you can no longer

afford because you are frightened of what others might say. We hold onto what is familiar for fear of facing change. We are frightened that if we let go we will 'lose it' altogether by falling into the abyss. This is a common anxiety for those of us who are suffering from depression, and I know it's very frightening.

But what are the options if we don't try something different? For a long time I depended on my self-reliance to protect me. I had been taught to be self-sufficient at any cost and to trust that I was the only person who could help me. But, the downside was that I felt lonely, resentful and hopeless. I may have appeared confident, but I was often aloof or secretive, keeping others away because it was too painful to let anyone know how I really felt. I struggled in relationships or needed to rely on medication to lessen the pain.

It was when my back was against the wall that I was most open to change. Putting in place the idea that I could rely on something other than my desperately controlling conscious mind helped to free me from the burden of depression. Reaching out in the belief that something other than my self-control could help me enabled me to feel liberated.

## **Keeping an open mind**

Try to keep an open mind to the possibility that connecting with this higher power can restore you to a sense of peace. Depression affects our minds, bodies and spirit. This is the point where we heal our spirit by taking the step towards a greater, loving power. We start by asking for courage to help us become whole again and to help us pick up the pieces of our shattered selves. This work doesn't come easy, and we must take tiny steps. We will fall down many, many times, but that doesn't mean we won't recover. Like a small child who takes their first steps and keeps trying even though they repeatedly fall, we will gradually build the confidence we need to believe we are OK, and that everything will turn out OK.

## Our real parent

Although our mothers gave birth to us, our true parent is our higher power. Our life's journey is to learn to reconnect with this power and discover our real selves by letting go of the legacy left by our parents. We walk away from the mold our parents made for us and reconnect to this loving force that can help us re-frame our past and look towards a radiant future. When we look back we will see that the depression we suffered was a supreme asset.

## How to contact our higher power

We all have our own way of speaking to that deep soulful part of us that is connected to our higher power. It may be that you find the support with a prayer. It may be that you make the connection by writing out your deepest feelings in a journal and asking your higher power to help you. Explore what works best for you.

Over the years I've worked with some incredible people, people who were willing to do whatever it took to climb out of the depths of depression. Here are a few words from three of them discussing how they've learned to trust in a higher power.

*When I feel desperate and I can't think of what else to do I just ask my higher power to take over. I see myself in the driving seat of a car and then I climb into the back seat and ask my higher power to take over. In my mind's eye I imagine myself looking at the back of his head with his hands on the steering wheel driving the car and I instantly feel my stress melt. I have to remember to do this, but when I do, it works! Wendy*

*When my life is in a mess I know it's because I've tried to run everything myself. So now when I find myself running around in circles, I stop and ask God to help me by putting my finger on my chest and asking it – him – whatever – to take over. It's just a way*

*I tell myself, 'time to drop the control'. Sometimes I have to do it every five minutes. I go, 'Oh Christ, what am I going to do?' Then I remember, put my finger on my chest and it makes me think 'I don't have to do anything because I can ask God to take over.' If I do this when things are really bad, within an hour it feels different and I feel better. Marcus*

*So – what I did to try and believe in a higher power was – I tried. I tried super hard. I begged for help by getting on my knees and praying, praying, praying. I did this all day long. I tried to do what I'd heard was the way to experiment with prayer – you know, to try it out to see if it worked in my life so that each time I prayed and had a positive experience related to that prayer, it's like I was gathering evidence in a scientific experiment. And it's through that process that I was able to come to believe in something greater than myself. Because praying does work. Or, at least it did for me. It made me feel better. It made me feel grounded and hopeful. It helped me feel connected. And, I'd say more than anything else, it just helped to distract me. I mean, prayer thoughts help me replace the thoughts I'd normally be having – you know, thoughts about what a piece of shit I was and how much I'd fucked up my life. So prayer definitely gave me relief. Jay*

How believing in a higher power helps us beat depression fast, essentially, developing trust is about letting go of trying to control everything outside of us and learning to rely on our higher power. Our need to control could be one reason why we've ended up in the dead-end alley of depression. Needing to feel certain about what goes on around us curtails our own natural resilience. We don't trust our own calm and wise inner voice, and having silenced it maybe for years, we can't hear it any more.

Yet that voice longs to be heard and it's waiting for us to listen. Our higher power is the highest level inside us. It is connected to our higher self, our core existence. It's not outside us or separate from

us. Once we accept this and begin to connect with it, we will start to experience the limitless power and intelligence life has to offer. It's as if the universe is living inside us, and meditation is the way to experience this power. This is the 'work' that helps us develop and trust that not only will everything be OK, but essentially, we are OK right now.

By undertaking the activities and listening to the meditation, for one week, we can begin to reconnect with the part of us that holds our intuition, the 'god' part of us. This is where our true voice lives and it's this voice we can turn to in times of turmoil for the answers we mistakenly believe are to be found outside of us. This meditation facilitates a two-way communication between us and our wise self. By repeating these activities and coming to rely on this higher power, we begin to hold the space for uncertainty and our willingness to trust will grow. We develop insight, knowledge and faith, and we often find answers within minutes.

Sometimes it's as simple as a prayer

Here is an example of a morning prayer and an evening prayer:

*Morning:*

God, take my life into your hands. Show me your plan for me today. And give me the power to carry it out.

*Evening:*

Higher power, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

## CHAPTER 14

# TOUCH THE VOID

Anyone who has experienced a deep depression – a depression that's lasted weeks, months or maybe years – knows the darkness. The darkness of depression is like the darkness of a thick, black cloud. It settles on the soul like a concrete coat. It feels like a physical garment because it's tangible and touchable. When it has settled in, it's hard to see ahead. The darkness makes our eyes foggy and our brains cloudy. All we sense is a void inside us; a dark, bottomless void.

But there is another side to depression. This depression fog is a way of helping you slow down and become more still. It helps you to give up what's not been working for you. It gives you the opportunity to transform your life and create positive change. It helps you catch up with yourself by slowing you down. Have you ever been pole-axed with fatigue – deep, deep fatigue that rendered you almost incapable of doing anything except the bare minimum to keep yourself alive? There's a reason for this.

Depression happens when we avoid our distressing emotions. It's brilliant. Most of us have buried emotions that would be very painful if we allowed them to surface. As we don't want to go through this experience, we unknowingly numb ourselves out – with depression. It's a fail-safe process that's there to keep us functioning in spite of having deep and painful emotions. However, our positive emotions also get thrown in the mix that means that when we suffer from depression, not only do we not feel our pain; we also don't feel our joy.

Research by Hayes and others published in 2004 in *The Psychological Record* shows that when we can't feel our distressing emotions, we can't take proper care of ourselves. This is because we use numbing

tactics to avoid feelings and these tactics are usually not good for us. We may resort to drinking, taking prescription or street drugs, or become extremely busy. However, when we become willing to experience and accept our distressing emotions, the same research shows that we can halve the severity of the depressive symptoms. In a nutshell, we can recover from depression faster if we allow ourselves to feel the negative emotions the depression is so valiantly trying to press down.

Our culture fanatically promotes the idea of avoiding any emotion that might cause distress. If we succumbed to sadness or anxiety as a child we might well have been told to 'pull our socks up' and improve the way we behaved. We learned to grit our teeth and become a 'more productive human being' by burying our deeper feelings. As children, we generally were never questioned if there was something wrong at a deeper level and we probably didn't have the vocabulary or the confidence to stand up to the authority figures in our lives. Depression can arise when we aren't allowed to express our negative emotions in a way that can truly be heard and understood.

In dealing with the outside world the culture we encounter is often based on the concept, 'If you don't like it, don't do it' or 'get rid of it'. In the short term this might help us get through the day, but on a longer-term basis, this approach can stifle the person trapped inside. People who suffer deep depression are often very sensitive and may find that burying how they really feel about things is the only way to survive. But there is a price to pay.

Perhaps the following exchange sounds familiar to you.

You meet someone and their first greeting is: 'How are you?' And you reply: 'Fine thanks, how are you?' And they reply - 'I'm fine thanks.' Fine can also be defined as:

- F-rightened
- I-nsecure
- N-ervous
- E-motional

The words might sum up how you feel when you're meeting people you are not comfortable with.

Because we've learned and practiced this behavior for a long time, maybe forever, it's deeply ingrained. We inadvertently feed this behavior and, as we feed it, it grows bigger. The more we avoid our distress, the more it grows and the more frightening it becomes. The feelings of distress can become so frightening that our tactics to avoid them have to become big enough to overcome the fear.

If this is what you have been doing, please don't beat yourself up over it. This is a perfectly logical response to a difficult set of circumstances – and you've been taught to respond in this way. You wouldn't have chosen to bury your feelings, but that's the mold that was set up for you. Now, however, we are adults, and it's up to us to change our responses to our own distress so we can feel better and beat the depression as fast as possible.

Stage one is to try and stop blaming yourself for feeling so defeated by depression. You didn't ask for it, you didn't invite it, and you didn't cause it. You've tried to deal with your pain and so far your methods may not seem to have worked, but that doesn't mean you can't feel compassionate towards yourself for trying.

Now you're ready to try a different approach.

## **Willingness to let the distress out**

As we saw in the previous chapter, Step 2, Trust, willingness is the opposite of control. In that step we looked at being willing

to acknowledge a higher power within you. Now I want you to become willing to allow your emotions to break through the blanket of depression and come to the surface. I want you to adopt a loving approach to your hurting self as that will help you feel safer. The emotions are buried because it doesn't feel OK for them to come out.

But, if you nurture them they will be released, and this will unburden you. The goal here is not to feel happy, but to feel more at peace – and that is a lasting benefit.

The path to freedom can sometimes take us in a direction we didn't want to go. There's a quote by a Buddhist nun named Pema Chodron about this journey. She says: 'In the process of discovering our true nature, the journey goes down, not up, as if the mountain pointed toward the earth instead of the sky. We move down and down and down, and with us move millions of others, our companions in awakening . . . right there we discover a love that will not die.' We can expand awareness and consecrate this journey, which will bring us hope that we can transform ourselves.

## **Discovering our emotional landscape**

Think of yourself as a beautiful lake – majestic and alive. In the very depths of the lake lies your inner peace, the source of your lifeblood. The surface represents your conscious thinking mind. If the surface is turbulent, you will feel unsettled, if it's still, you will be at peace. In between the peaceful bottom and the surface lies your emotional landscape. The currents just beneath the surface swirl and tug, and consequently agitate your feelings. These currents use up precious resources because we pay so much attention to the emotions that are floating just below the surface. The chronic emotional turmoil acts as a barrier to the peace and stillness resting in the depths of the lake. If you release the emotional energy that has built up it will allow you access to the sacred tranquility sitting there awaiting you. You can do this by identifying and releasing hidden feelings. But it is

important to remember that you are not your feelings. Your feelings are a response to something that's happened. We all feel things all the time and we may have several feelings at once. But holding on to unacknowledged feelings can keep us trapped. Releasing them and accepting them can allow new responses and a lifting of the weight of past unhappiness.

Before we do this we need to begin by distinguishing feelings. If you have been depressed for many weeks, months or even years, you may not understand what feelings are. Depression may have taught you to not be in tune with your feelings. You may feel confused about what you feel. Naming feelings is an anathema and can make you feel frightened and want to run away. I know for me when I was in the midst of depression even the word 'feelings' could fill me with dread. Oddly enough, I was excellent at identifying other people's feelings. In fact, I sometimes based how I felt on what other people were feeling. In this way, by experiencing their moods, I felt safe and in control.

To be asked to 'release hidden feelings' can be tantamount to torture. But this work must be done if we want to recover from depression – fast. There is no shortcut, but once you get started, they'll be no stopping you. It's not easy – but then neither is being numbed out!

Let's not kid ourselves, however, this part is difficult. Avoiding our feelings is called 'numbing out' and is a common response to painful and distressing situations. But over time this avoidance can become a destructive way to live. It's a bit like driving a car with a clunky noise coming from the engine. We try turning up the radio to block out the noise but that isn't dealing with the real issue. Even though we can't hear the engine noise any longer, we know it's still there. It's one more thing that creates more anxiety – anxiety that's already running high!

When you begin the practice of tuning back into your feelings, there

may be a lag time where you're unsure of what you're feeling. This is because you may not be used to being in touch with them. But give yourself time and space. It may be helpful to think of feelings in the way Buddhists do – they describe them as 'clouds that pass by' and that is a very good description. Your feelings may be powerful, but they will pass and new feelings will replace them.

By accepting powerful feelings you will find they no longer have such power. If we think we have to suffer, the very thought tends to makes us suffer more. But if we accept our suffering, we can move beyond it. It is important to be gentle while you reconnect with that hidden part of yourself and take it a day at a time, an hour at a time, a minute at a time.

Let's get started

Here's a quick exercise to do when you feel overwhelmed with powerful feelings. Fill in the blank spaces any way you like.

I am feeling \_\_\_\_\_. It is OK; I can allow myself to have this feeling. I can make space for it . . . I don't have to be afraid of it, to try to get rid of it or to be caught up in it.

I feel this emotion physically in my body in my \_\_\_\_\_. Breathe into this spot or spots one by one, three deep breaths in, three deep breaths out for each spot.

\_\_\_\_\_ is just an emotion, just a feeling to be felt, nothing more and nothing less. I am not my emotion. I am an observer of my emotion. \_\_\_\_\_ is just like an ocean wave. It comes and it goes . . . I can turn my attention to the present, noting my breathing, noticing what I see, hear, smell, and taste all around me.

Healing the feelings and finding the buried treasure

The promise of this book is that when you begin to acknowledge and respect the spectrum of feelings you have deep inside, you will be able to release them and find the buried treasure of peace and tranquility that lies beneath.

## **Levels of feeling awareness**

When you first become aware of your feelings you may simply see them as good or bad, positive or negative. This is because we tend to be unaware of the full spectrum of our feelings. Generally speaking we have four different levels of awareness about our feelings.

- The first level is when we don't really feel our feelings. An example of this would be when someone asks you how you are and you actually don't know. You may report that you are 'fine', as that is what people expect to hear, but in all honesty you couldn't actually describe how you feel.
- The second level is when we begin to explore our feelings. Once you realize you do have feelings, you become more aware of changes in your inner world but may still be confused as to what that means. You may tend to keep that information to yourself.
- The third level is when we begin to experience the feelings and we start to recognize them rather than simply feeling numbed out. This level can be quite scary if you've never really experienced your feelings. It can make you feel a bit out of control, but it's important to recognize that these are just feelings; like clouds in the sky, they will pass.
- The fourth level of feeling awareness is when we begin to share our feelings with another person. You may stumble at this point because you're not really sure who to talk to or what to say.

## **Who to share with**

In order to check who is safe to share your feelings with, you can start by sharing just a little of your feelings with someone and then check the response. If you feel heard and not judged, and they support you, you may go back to them. Someone who doesn't try to jump in and fix you when you share your feelings is a good indicator of someone who might be able to really listen to you. A counselor or a therapist is a brilliant person with whom to check out your feelings, as you should feel safe and supported. However, there are many self-help groups that can also be a place to go to, for instance the various 12-step groups. You will find other suggestions in How to Get Help at the end of the book.

Once you begin to trust yourself and others with your feelings, amazing things begin to happen. One word from someone else can make the difference between feeling totally isolated and feeling completely at peace or 'normal'! It can bring a great sense of freedom and hope in knowing you're not alone. This is the beginning of a spiritual transformation.

## **The risks of sharing your feelings**

Sharing your feelings is risky. But it's worth the risk because the rewards are magnificent. Sharing with others brings you on an equal level with people. You no longer have to depend on their approval or manipulate them for their attention. You may have been hiding your feelings from other people for fear of being judged. Now you know you can come out of the darkness and into the light and experience all of your feelings truthfully and share them honestly.

If you feel you need help in feeling comfortable trusting the people you want to share your feelings with, you might like to spend a little time meditating on the question, tuning into your still centre and checking your feelings from a place of calmness. The inner place of

peace and calmness, the place I call your higher power, can be a very helpful guide here.

The next challenge you are likely to face is accepting loving support and praise from people with whom you have shared your feelings. We have a praise deficiency. We tend to dismiss praise because we've operated with shut down feelings. It is important to begin by praising ourselves first and that will lead us to accepting it from others. We can ask ourselves why we push others away. Once we can see that's how we behave, we can accept it. Once we accept it, things will change and we will learn to let others in.

## **Transforming our feelings to beat depression fast**

It could be said that depression is a result of one feeling after another being ignored. Had we known that, we probably wouldn't have ignored them in the first place. But now we have some steps to move on and we can allow ourselves to become excited and hopeful. The promise is: as we become aware of our painful feelings, we can then set them free. As each painful feeling is set free, we lift the burden on ourselves. As a result, we will experience gratitude to have discovered how to transform our pain into joy.

It's like a concert with the peaks and troughs, the high notes and the low notes, all working in harmony within our lives. There is no point in trying to ignore our feelings any longer. Our feelings are a vital part of our complete selves and we honor and respect ourselves when we do this feeling work.

## **The beauty of healthy pain**

There is value in freeing ourselves from pain. This is the healthy road to recovery from depression. You may have experienced much pain in your life: heartbreak, despair, abuse, hopelessness and misery. But healthy pain is different. Healthy pain is healing, and tears are

the coins of healing. It's a different feeling and comes from saying goodbye to the ways we've treated ourselves and others in the past. It's a soft pain that brings freedom and acceptance.

When I was unwilling to acknowledge my hurt and suffered in silence, I prolonged the agony. I dreaded having to open up to the pain because I was scared that if I started to cry, I would never stop. But by acknowledging my hurt I finally brought depression to an end.

If you are feeling scared about opening up to your feelings, try turning to your higher power for guidance. In the still space of quiet prayer or meditation you will be heard. As I opened to my pain I found I never experienced more pain than I could handle. I found, for example, that it's almost impossible to cry for more than 15 minutes because the body has only got that many tears. After that it's dry heaving! Within an hour I felt the difference – lightness in the heart, a little less burden in the soul and a feeling of hope for recovery.

The tears that come at this time are the greatest healer.

### **A special note on anger**

We need to pay careful attention to our anger because it's widely known that depression is anger turned inward. Suppressing anger is self-destructive because the negative energy redirects into the body. Anger is a fiery emotion whose purpose is to help us resolve problems, deep issues and internal conflict. It's like a pressure-release valve and it's better to release anger than to turn it inside and let it destroy us. However, we are not taught that it's healthy to let out anger. It is true that if anger explodes uncontrollably it can be counterproductive and we don't get what we need. The world always reflects our actions and if we explode with rage, the world lashes back at us, which causes more distress.

The only real release of anger is to resolve the deeper issues behind it, bring the pain or unhappiness to the surface and use the powerful anger 'energy' to take positive action. We can shout and scream at others but this is futile because it doesn't nurture us. Gone are the days when we had to rage and shout, scream at an empty chair or pummel pillows until we're red in the face. Rage, which is anger that can't be held in any longer, is a child-like reaction to buried anger. One study determined that explosive rage was actually bad for the health because when the participants went into 'a fit of rage' their blood pressure went up and they were more likely to experience heart problems. Lashing out is an inefficient attempt to resolve a problem or make it go away.

Anger is a need that hasn't been met. Therefore we can surmise that the best way of tackling anger is to establish what we need and work from there. I know that when I'm angry and I understand the source of my anger, I can diffuse it by changing something or asking for something. I used to get myself in a tight corner, for example, when I did something for someone hoping that they would see me as a 'hero'. And they didn't; they didn't even say thanks! Of course, I'd set myself up to feel bad because I'd assumed they would say thanks and appreciate me.

In this situation I had two choices: one, ask the person if they liked what I did, or two, give myself the praise I was after. Either way, I acknowledged my resentment, but I also did something about it. I didn't sit on it until it built into a volcano of anger. Many of us who suffer from depression are people-pleasers who want and need recognition but think we never get it. Tackling the themes around anger is probably the most important thing we can do to help ourselves. There is a specific activity (Activity 3) in the following section to help tackle buried anger.

Many of us have anger about our past. We think about it over and over again. But this is only a thought, or a series of thoughts – though

very destructive. The memory of the past is what we think happened – but it's gone now and we can release the precious energy it takes to maintain a hold on it. We can't ever resolve our past, but with mindful acceptance we can use our anger to clear up issues we have today. If we have current resentments about someone, we can feel the fire of our anger and channel it to find a resolution.

For example, if I feel angry with a friend for not returning my calls, instead of falling into the victim role, I leave a message on her phone asking her why she hasn't returned my calls. In the past, before I had this insight, I would have seethed about it for days until I finally deduced that it was because I wasn't worth calling back! That's how the anger turned in on me. And then I couldn't speak to her for months. Lost the friend, as well! Ouch! So painful. Now I can feel angry, but take action without trying to destroy the other person.

We can use acceptance as a way of releasing resentments long before they boil up to become anger. Buddhists say that 'peace is the true path of the warrior' and if we use the sword, we've lost from the start. We don't want to lose sight of our anger, but we do want to transform it into a powerful force to help lift us out of depression. Gandhi said 'I have learned through bitter experience the one supreme lesson to conserve my anger and, as heat conserved is transmitted into energy, even so our anger controlled can be transmitted into a power that can move the world.'

It is possible to pull our anger out of us like we might raise a pop-up exhibition banner and clip it on the top hook. There it is – powerful anger that we can use to our advantage, standing tall and strong! What would your banner say on it? I would like mine to say 'Here's Alex's strength. It's looking after her and getting her needs met!' We don't want to remove our anger; we want to make it useful. Sometimes we need anger to deal with angry people. We're not passive; we need to stand up for ourselves. But we don't want it to destroy us. We want it to move mountains.

## Activities

By completing these three activities and doing them on a regular basis we begin to clear the backlog of feelings that have built up. Once we start to feel 'lighter' and have fewer burdens there will be two gifts: one is that the depression will lift, and the second is that we will begin to touch the natural state of joy that is waiting for us beneath the buried feelings. An awakening of the heart will begin.

### Activity 1: Naming feelings

One of the techniques some of us who've suffered from long-term depression have got used to is bundling our feelings together until they look like a ball of tightly bound rubber bands. It's time to take stock and tease out the rubber bands and identify individual feelings. However, you may find difficulty naming your feelings if you have numbed out over a number of years.

To help you get started, below is a list of feelings with a clear description:

- Love: lightness in the body, feeling listened to, warmth in the heart, feeling valued and understood and safe with another person.
- Anger: having a tight jaw, sensing a clenching energy in the chest, pupils dilated, having racing thoughts.
- Fear: having a pounding heartbeat, feeling extremely alert, skin going hot or cold and tight rapid breathing.
- Guilt: a sense of regret for doing something wrong, being neglectful of another person.
- Shame: a feeling of being broken, a burning sensation in the tummy, a sense that the body is shrinking, spiraling down, throat is constricted, speaking is difficult, breathing is difficult, heaviness on the chest. (NB: Guilt is regret about something we have done, whereas shame is feeling bad about whom we are.)

- Happiness: when you feel like smiling, a very light feeling of being in good humor and good spirits.
- Grief: a feeling that something has been taken away, yearning for something that has gone, a sense that the crying will never stop, a feeling of disorientation.
- Abandonment: a sense of being left out, pushed out, forgotten, minimized, vulnerable and betrayed, feeling like a dot on the horizon, feeling tiny and lost.
- Hope: a trust in ourselves and the world that things will work out, energy level rising and life hitting all the positives, breathing easier and lighter.
- Embarrassed: feeling exposed, vulnerable, ridiculed, confronted, which makes us feel flushed and hot, feeling red in the face, stomach butterflies and faltering breath (or faltered breathing).
- Humiliation: a sense of being abused, someone has stolen something from us, our self-respect has deserted us.
- Betrayed: feeling deceived, an inward and downward spiraling feeling that depletes us of energy, no trust left in anything or anyone.
- Inspired: feeling light and energetic, able to overcome any problem, finding a solution, a sense of wonder, seeing the world in Technicolor.
- Satisfaction: a sense of being completely full and restored, being rooted in the body and the body being rooted in the ground, not needing to be elsewhere.
- Joy: a sense of feeling like the inside of us matches the outside, inner peace, we have what we need, believing in the abundance of the universe, and that all we need will come to us, energized but calm, warm and light, seeing others in the same way and feeling their light connecting to our light.

Pick out three feelings that dominate you. If you don't think you experience feelings, think about something like a movie or a song that caused emotion to stir up in you and use those feelings for this



activity. Open your journal and write the answer to these questions about the three feelings:

- Identify feeling in my body...
- Measure depth of feeling on a scale of 1-10
- Reminds me of when . . .
- Open my heart and accept this feeling

Next to each of the three feelings, answer each question. Here's an example:

	<i>Identify feeling in my body</i>	<i>Emphasis scale 1-10</i>	<i>Reminds me of when...</i>	<i>How can I open my heart and accept then release this feeling?</i>
Grief	A deep sensation in my chest	8	Feeling lost and abandoned as a child	Imagine it flying out of me
Frustration	A hotness in my head	7	None of my family would talk to me	Thump a pillow and then it will go
Joy	Deep in my stomach – a warm glow	If I focus on it a 6	I had nothing to worry about	I don't want to release it!



Identify your feeling and then score its intensity. Then try to identify what it reminds you of in the past. It's been said that if you experience a feeling for more than 15 minutes then its roots are buried in the past. By discovering, uncovering and accepting this, you will find it easy to move beyond any distress this feeling creates. Repeat this activity once a day in your journal. You will find that, over time, you will come to identify your feelings quickly and easily. By accepting and reuniting with them you are accepting and reuniting with your true self.

## **Activity 2: Being objective about your feelings**

Take a moment to pick out the most painful feeling that comes to mind, one that really sinks you. Now imagine you've picked up that feeling with both hands and placed it on a table. Answer these questions:

- What shape is it?
- How big is it?
- What color is it?
- Where does it usually live in your body?
- What effect does it have on your body?
- If you hold it in your hand, what does it feel like?

The next questions are the most important. They are about the resistance you have about your painful feeling:

- Where does your resistance towards that feeling live in your body?
- What shape is it?
- How big is it?
- What color is it?
- What effect does it have on your body?
- If you hold it in your hand, what does it feel like? How does the resistance feel towards your painful feeling? Hate, aggression,



rejection?

The resistance is causing you the most pain, not the feeling itself. Can you make a decision to welcome the feeling back into your body, no matter how painful it is? Can you accept it without judgment or criticism? It is a part of you and it belongs to you for a reason. For now all you have to do is accept it without resisting it. The feeling will be accepted and this will make you feel better, faster.

### **Activity 3: A special activity to heal anger**

Buried anger is the most likely cause of depression. Many of us don't actually realize or even believe we're angry. Anger can be disguised in many forms, but it is usually buried deep in anyone who suffers from depression. Here's a list of symptoms of buried anger:

- Chronic pain in the neck or jaw
- Sarcasm
- Ironical humor
- Boredom, apathy, disinterest, can't be bothered
- Nightmares
- Smiling when you don't want to
- Controlling your voice
- Grinding your teeth at night
- Becoming irritated at irrelevant things
- Body tics or spasmodic movements that you are unaware of
- Stomach ulcers
- Constant cheerfulness and 'grin and bear it' attitude
- Refusing eye contact
- Clenching a thumb in a fist
- Over politeness
- Not sleeping, or sleeping too much
- Frustration at everything around you
- A feeling that life's not good enough





If you see three or more that apply to you, chances are you suffer from buried anger. Buried anger usually covers a loss. Anger and loss go hand in hand. To relieve you of the burden of buried anger it's important to link it to the appropriate loss and the relief will be immediate.

Here's the activity to do that:

In your journal write these four headings and see the example answers in the grid:

<i>I am angry about</i>	<i>Because</i>	<i>It affects me by</i>	<i>The loss underneath the anger is</i>
The way my friend has treated me over me not taking part in his football weekend.	I have tried to make things right by getting someone to fill in for me; I couldn't go because I knew I would end up abusing myself with alcohol.	Making me feel like I've done something wrong but I haven't - I'm only human and right now I have to put myself first and I can't assume responsibility for sorting out his weekend.	That I'm afraid he won't like and respect me any more; well, let's face it, he hasn't spoken to me for a week!

Once the anger and loss are identified, lots of choices emerge. In this example I can praise myself for doing what felt right for me rather than people-pleasing my friend and ending up feeling resentful. I can stop beating myself up with critical thoughts. I can tell him that I don't like the way he has treated me after I didn't do what he wanted. I can say I didn't want to come because I don't like football.

## **The journey**

Our feeling-recovery journey restores our inner faith that we are OK. The journey is like peeling an onion: there are layers to go through. Some bring tears and some bring a clean skin. This will bring us balance. Anger and grief are the two sources of healing. We discover that we aren't bad people. We are simple human beings who want to make things right and move forward. This feeling work will help us do this. We are gentle with ourselves but we don't make excuses for acting out in harmful ways. We pray for help to stop judging ourselves. We start to forgive ourselves and begin to see light at the end of the tunnel.

## **Meditation to explore difficult feelings:**

Settle down in a comfortable chair sitting upright with your feet on the floor. Make sure you are in a room where you can't be disturbed. Now bring your attention to your breath . . . and feel the rise and fall of the abdomen as your breath moves in and out. Sit here for a moment and let your breath be your guide . . .

As you breathe in and out . . . you may notice your mind is wandering off in thoughts . . . or that you experience physical sensations in your body . . .

Instead of trying to control these thoughts and sensations . . . bring your attention into your body and become aware of the physical sensations in your body . . . These sensations may be very, very

subtle. . . . or they may be very strong. . . . It's of no consequence how these physical sensations present themselves to you . . . . only that you bring your awareness to them and allow your conscious self simply to become attentive to them . . . .

Bring your mind now to the sensation that stands out over all the other sensations . . . . Find the place in your body where the strongest sensation manifests itself . . . . Take your awareness from your abdomen into the part of the body where this strong sensation is sitting . . . . The idea is not to change the feeling but to notice it . . . . and become aware of it . . . .

If you can isolate the feeling then notice how your breath flows into the sensation and flows out of the sensation . . . . When that sensation has become less significant . . . . move your attention to another sensation you feel in another part of you . . . .

As your mind wanders through this meditation, become aware of the physical sensations that happen in your body as a result of your thoughts . . . . As each thought takes your attention you may feel a corresponding sensation . . . .

Simply bring your attention to the sensation and create a space around it allowing it to be present in your body in this moment. . . . And as each sensation fades away, bring your attention to other parts of your body that may hold feelings . . . . These feelings are seeking your attention. They want to be accepted so they can be released.

Spend a few moments now bringing your attention to all parts of your body where there may be sensations.

As you come to the end of this meditation you know you can come back to this place at any time and become acquainted with the feelings that are waiting for your attention and for your release.



## **Affirmations**

I have feelings, but I'm not my feelings. Today I can let my feelings come and go. If I feel sad today I will remember that the feeling will pass and I will smile again. I have the power to choose to remember that my feelings are temporary, like passing clouds in the sky, and that I can be separate from those clouds and watch them pass.

I am beginning to realize that my feelings are nothing to be afraid of. They can't hurt me or anyone else. I no longer need to deny myself my feelings. I have always judged myself harshly for my feelings, but today I will cease. My feelings are unique to me and I will respect them as I learn about them, meet them and then release them.

I respect my feelings today. They make up patterns which, when put together, create a unique me, like a box of puzzle pieces which, when put together, make a beautiful picture. Today I appreciate the beautiful picture made from my feelings and me.



## CHAPTER 15

# Become Fully Responsible

**W**hen suffering from depression we tend to believe we are a lot more responsible for other people and situations than is good for us. Being overly responsible is needing to be in control. It is characterized by fear, force and a lack of trust that everything's going to turn out OK.

Some people truly believe that they are responsible for another person's happiness, especially someone whom they cherish. Everything may be going fine until the other person is not happy. Then we think it's our responsibility to put that right. Perhaps that's why we feel so depressed. Being overly responsible is born out of the need to have power over everything. We want things to happen our way because – basically – we're running scared and we don't trust things are going to work out OK. But things don't work out OK because we end up with physical and/ or emotional burnout.

At the same time we are each completely responsible for our own life. We were born alone and we'll die alone; there is no safety net. No matter whom we turn to for help, recovery from depression comes down to us. Others can guide us and make suggestions but they can't do the work for us. As adults we are 100 percent responsible for ourselves. But, if we're depressed we can't see this.

This was a tough lesson for me to learn and, to a certain extent, still is. Being responsible for myself, not being responsible for anyone else and not looking to anyone else to fix me are traits I have to work on daily. However, I'm grateful for the opportunity because I've grown up. Life-long patterns that came from being raised by an alcoholic mother, who told me I was responsible for ruining her life, were hard to change. This is the work I had to focus on to get a reality check. Was I really not responsible for other people's

feelings? It took me a while to truly believe it. But I have, more or less, and now I'm living a depression-free life. My biggest problem is not to feel guilty when I stand up for myself and put my needs first. That feeling of responsibility still comes up each time I put myself first, but I'm working on it.

What stops us from being fully responsible for ourselves? Trying to live other people's lives! It's a trap. We think we're 'helping', but in fact we're making ourselves depressed by getting involved in other people's lives trying to 'fix and rescue' them. We anticipate other people's needs, and then feel angry when they don't do what we want them to do. We try to please others instead of ourselves. We find it easier to express anger about things done to others rather than things done to us. We feel guilty when someone tries to help us. We feel worthless and empty if we don't have someone to help. We blame others for the distress we feel. We believe other people are making us depressed.

### **The victim/persecutor seesaw**

A simple analogy can help to demonstrate what happens to us when we don't take responsibility for ourselves, instead, preferring to be caught up in other people's lives. It's called the 'victim/persecutor see-saw'. At one end we have the persecutor and, at the other, the victim. We continually seesaw from one type of thinking to the other.

### **Victim thinking**

When we're depressed we see ourselves as victims. We are victims of society because we can't get where we want to be, of our childhood because of the way we were raised, of our friends because they abandoned us, of the workplace because we got a raw deal, others' behavior in our relationships because it affected us, and so on. We compare ourselves with others and generally come

out on the bottom of the pile. Other people seem to have so much going for them. They have good luck, land on their feet, never have anything to worry about and have people giving them a break. We, the victims, on the other hand, see ourselves having bad luck, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, dealing with insurmountable stress and having unavoidable pressures placed on us. We become locked into a lifetime of 'victim thinking' and it doesn't make us happy. In fact it makes us depressed!

### **Persecutor thinking**

Many of us have the capacity to turn into persecutors when we've had enough of being 'victimized' by others. We may end up saying things like: you always do that to me; you should think before you speak to me like that; you never help me when I need it; I'm always doing things for you and you never thank me. We're the worm that turned and we may be so surprised at our success in making others do what we want that we step into this role more often!

Persecutors are the bullies of life. We may not think of ourselves in this way, but all of us have the capacity to become one, especially when we're depressed. Acting as the persecutor is a defense mechanism, a way to run from our pain. We're hurting so much that all we can do is lash out like a wounded animal. We think if we don't dominate others they will dominate us, which will push the seesaw back the other way so we become the victim again. That terrifies us. This seesaw thinking can dominate our whole lives and we may not even know it.

### **The victim/persecutor trap**

When we're trapped in victim/persecutor thinking we truly believe others are responsible for us. This thinking is usually established in childhood and it comes as a revelation to many of us when we learn about it for the first time. Even though we can rationalize that the

victim is often an unwilling and unhappy participant, the persecutor is also a victim because they, too, feel trapped. When we're into 'victim-thinking' mode we can lock ourselves into believing others should feel sorry for us or 'save' us, and thus we unwittingly step into a helpless, childlike role. When we're into the 'persecutor-thinking' mode we trap ourselves into believing that we have to fight our way out of a bad situation because we've been harmed, judged or bad-mouthed, and it's up to us to sort it out! We didn't mean to get trapped, but sometimes it's all we've ever known.

Let's get a clarification in here: this isn't about someone who was in the wrong place at the wrong time and has had a crime committed against them like someone who's been mugged. This is about repeated 'victim-thinking' patterns that trap people into a state of mind that perpetuates victimhood, the sort of thinking that can lead us to believe there are only two roles in life – those who get what they want, and those who don't.

The real trap bites when someone reaches out with a hand of love and support and we can't accept it. The victim in us secretly doesn't want to change because being the victim is comfortable: it's what we know. Others try to help us but when they tell us how beautiful, powerful, intelligent and lovable we are, we can't take it on board. We can't believe they are telling the truth. We think they are saying these things to try and get us to do something, feel better or get out of their way. We think they are lying or have ulterior motives. They get angry because we don't respond how they want us to respond and this makes us feel even more victimized. We're caught up in others' lives and find it hard to map out our own edges. Who is responsible for whom?

For a long time I thought I could only be happy if I was in a relationship. I couldn't see myself being happy without one. It was as if I didn't exist outside of a relationship. I was like an 'add-on' to someone else's life. Nothing made sense without a relationship. I

had no 'me' – I had no idea who Alex was. I needed a relationship to make me feel whole. The problem was I needed it to be run on my terms because I was trying to shore up my crumbling self-esteem. I was controlling, manipulative, depressed and I really, really believed that it was the other person's responsibility to make me happy. Having done much recovery work to this point, I can look back and see how much pain I was running from and how I was desperately hoping someone else could fix me.

Many of us have become victims because we consistently give more than we receive and try to anticipate what others need, then get angry when no one gives back to us. And we genuinely feel guilty when someone does give to us so it's hard to climb out of the trap. We're so focused on what others want, and what they want us to be, that if we're not wanted, we feel rejection and dismay.

## **Getting off the see-saw**

If I were to tell you that this trap is an illusion, would you believe me? Yes, it's true. What is missing are the alternatives. When we're depressed we tend to see life as black or white. Getting off the seesaw means seeing the other shades and a whole spectrum of color in-between. It is possible to get off the seesaw and be neither the victim nor persecutor. We can become more than this thinking. Just because life has dealt us a series of blows and we've felt more pain than we thought possible, it doesn't mean it's going to be like this forever. But we need to give ourselves time, and love. We need to employ our loving parent and ask for help from our higher power. Once we begin to put changes in place, life opens up for us. Each of us has the potential to enjoy a worthwhile and joyous life no matter where we've come from.

The difference between being over-responsible for others and taking responsibility for ourselves, to step off the seesaw, we must identify how we take responsibility for other people. We think we're being



selfless, but the real definition of that word is self-less. We are not taking care of the self; in fact we make our self-worth less than it is. When we do this we are abdicating responsibility for ourselves by preferring to put others' needs above our own.

Here is a comparison between being over-responsible for others, and taking responsibility for us.

Ways we are over responsible for others

- Feeling responsible for others' choices
- Assuming we know what others are thinking
- Taking the blame for everything that goes wrong, but not the credit when it goes right giving advice when it's not asked for
- Thinking we know what's right for others
- Doing things that are not helpful to us
- Blaming others when our life goes belly-up
- Getting angry when people don't do what we want
- Abandoning our lives to make way for someone else's life
- Overcommitting to others
- Saying yes when we mean no
- We ask questions or make statements like:
  - 'Do you still love me?'
  - 'I'm nothing without you'
  - 'After all I do for you . . .'
  - 'You always . . .'
  - 'You never . . .'
  - 'You'll never leave me will you?'

Ways we are responsible for ourselves

- Accepting that no one else puts thoughts in our head; seems silly, but amazing when we think about it . . . no one else can make us think about things we don't want to think about
- Accepting that we choose our life direction and knowing we



can't blame others for how it turns out

- Being our real selves with other people and feeling good about it
- Understanding we are our own best guide and that we don't look to other people to make us feel good
- Knowing that no matter what we feel, negative or positive, no one 'made' us feel that way and we are 100 percent responsible
- Believing that no matter what's happened in the past, no one else is responsible for us now
- Accepting the consequences of all our actions
- Not accepting any responsibility for others (except our children)
- Appreciating we are 100 percent responsible for our own personal growth, emotional stability, physical health and self-esteem
- Being honest about our talents and skills

This over-responsible behavior is often characterized by an intense anxiety around relationships. We find ourselves monitoring the dynamics between others and us and dedicating ourselves to what others need. We often have strong ideas of how things 'should' be and can be overly helpful in trying to fix things, all in a desperate quest to quell our own anxiety. This behavior can lead us into the 'trap' of the victim – and we're back on the seesaw. Then we can blame the 'other' for our depression. It's hard to see our part when we're stuck because we truly believe we are being kind and selfless. Turn 'accept responsibility' into 'becoming response-able'

If someone has carried out an act that is abusive towards us, who is responsible for the pain it causes? Consider this: several people can experience the same abusive act and they will all have a different response. Some people might think 'Well it wasn't personal to me.' Others might think 'What did I do to deserve that?' Everyone has a different indicator of pain in the same situation. We are responsible for the level of pain and the control button that makes it go up or down. Those of us who suffer from depression will know that our pain switch varies, but we often struggle to keep it on low, which

indicates our ability to respond well to the situation is also low. This happens when we 'react' to a situation instead of responding to it. Reactions are generally based way back in childhood patterns of behavior – but responses can be made today. Being response-able is when we think before we feel, try to rationalize a situation and don't jump in with a knee-jerk reaction. We don't assume everything is our fault. We apportion responsibility appropriately. For example, if someone shouted at me, instead of feeling like a worm, I could step back and ask myself why they shouted. I could rationalize the behavior as unnecessary – unless it was vital because of an emergency situation – and take a view on how I wanted to respond. This is taking response-ability.

The more we do this, the more we reduce our reactive responses because we calm down the response stimulus. This makes us free to be more responsive, which then helps us have more control over the choices about how we wish to behave in other people's company. As a result, our self-worth increases which strengthens our ability to stay strong, no matter what others say to us or about us. Our reactions no longer drag us into the den of iniquity: self-loathing, self-pity and ultimately depression. We respond with the head of an adult rather than the battered emotions of a child. We don't let others walk over us because we have new strength and power.

Practicing this can help us break old patterns when others try to drag us back into destructive behavior. Reacting to others gives them fire to play with – and we are the ones who end up getting burned. If we respond rather than react, we retain our power. For example if someone pointed their finger at me and accused me of not being a nice person, my response is not to defend myself but to say something like 'an interesting point of view'. The moment I argue back I continue a cycle of attack/retreat/defense. Apologizing, arguing or explaining my standpoint only gives the other person permission to continue to react. But by using a phrase like 'I'll take that away and think about it' we are responding politely and

respectfully, but at the same time, setting our boundaries.

Let's go through some steps to begin to redress the balance. The starting point is to take good care of us.

## **Taking good care**

Let's acknowledge what 'taking good care' is not. It isn't putting our own needs above everyone else's at their expense. For example, if I want a new wardrobe and I spend the family housekeeping funds on getting it, leaving no money for groceries, and say 'I'm just taking care of myself' – it won't wash. Turning up at my parents' home for a fortnight's holiday without being invited because I'm 'taking care of my needs' doesn't cut it. This isn't about greed, manipulation or imposing what I want on anyone else.

Taking good care is a new way of thinking. It is as follows:

- I am responsible for me.
- I am responsible for meeting my own needs, for taking care of my own spiritual path, taking care of my body, eating healthily, financing my life, ensuring my emotional needs are taken care of (by getting the right help if necessary) and for living my own life.
- I am responsible for choosing who I give to or take from, setting life goals and sticking to them or changing course if I choose to.
- Responsibility for the outcome of my life lies at my door and will be the result of what I think, feel and how I behave. I am responsible for choosing who I love and whose love I choose to receive.
- I'm responsible for the compromises I make to get my needs met. I value the choices I've made and I will accept the consequences of the choices that haven't worked out so well.
- I will make decisions that will increase my self-worth and if they don't, I will accept responsibility for this.
- I will not allow others to abuse me because I have rights, and it's

my responsibility to assert these rights. I value my rights and the decisions I make around them.

- However, these are my rights and I don't have to force them on others. I respect others' rights and that their feelings and decisions are different than mine.
- I won't impose my decisions on others and I expect others not to impose their decisions on me.
- Finally, I will be mindful of how my decisions affect those people with whom I have relationships.

Taking good care isn't selfish, it's self-responsible. It's meeting our needs. We can't meet anyone else's needs until we can fulfil our own. Learning to meet our needs and be responsible for the outcome is the path to freedom and new choices. We can learn to take care of our needs very quickly. We know what we need and we have the internal resources to seek ways of getting them fulfilled.

The healing begins when we begin self-care. This is the alternative to accepting responsibility for others. Self-care is learning what we need to feel good. A simple way to identify self-care for ourselves is to ask: what do I need to take care of myself? We turn to our higher power, we write the question in our journal and we trust our loving parent. We need to dig deep and listen for the answers. There's a saying that goes:

We ask with prayer and we listen to the answer with meditation. We have to challenge the limitations of our thinking when we punish ourselves for having needs. All of us are human and humans have needs. When we think others have deserted us, we can turn that thought around and notice that we have deserted ourselves. Once we do that, we can take positive action. There is another lovely saying:

*Everything will come to you at the right time*

And it's true. My experience is that I've always gotten what I needed at the right time. It may not have been what I wanted, but it was what I needed. It helped me change and grow and flourish.

## **Developing gentleness and compassion**

Gentleness and compassion is at the heart of taking good care of you. No one needs it more than those of us who've suffered from depression. Listening to your inner child and taking its needs seriously is compassion at its best. When you're pole-axed with depression, perhaps all you need is a safe place to hide. Taking yourself to bed, wrapping up in a blanket and sipping a hot drink is gentleness at its best. We are humans trying to do our best, and somehow we got lost. Feeling the warmth of your loving parent and lighting a candle for a soothing bath is a good way of slowing down. Giving yourself a treat or a fun day out is kind and caring. We can start with small things like taking care of ourselves with consideration rather than like a critical parent.

Trust is the way out

Many people have been victimized at some stage in their lives; perhaps this has happened to you. Often this trait is seeded in childhood. Victim thinking may have caused a lot of harm and driven us into a corner. However, once we realize this we have an obligation to ourselves to turn this around 180 degrees. If you see a child being picked on by a group of other children, should you impassively stand and watch? Or should you go up to the crowd and say 'Hey kids, leave him alone'?

We don't have to continue to feel like a victim. By understanding that feeling like a victim is only a thought, we have the starting point that can help us to move out of this unhelpful thinking.

It's only a thought!

You may have to go on trust alone until you've worked through the activities at the end of this step and begin to feel the difference when you take full responsibility for your life and claim your own power. I had to get on my knees, every day, sometimes every hour, to get through this. I begged for help to take away the blackness I was left with after beating myself up. Time after time I thought I'd done the wrong thing, talked out of turn, let everyone down, failed my goals, behaved in a bad way, made others ashamed of me and so on. It turns out, 99 percent of what I experienced was a fantasy that I was locked – yes, locked – into. It was all in my head and yet I thought it was really happening. That is the craziness of the victim/persecutor thinking. It almost destroyed me and I didn't realize I had the power to change it until it was almost too late. However, I did realize it, and here I am writing about it. Those hours on my knees begging for help and trusting in my higher power got me through. The activities that follow are also part of the work I did to realign my thinking.

## **Activities**

Here are three activities that can help you:

- Discover when you take on responsibility for others
- Learn how to say yes and no
- Learn how to reduce your reactive responses

### **Activity 1: When we take on responsibility for others.**

*Write down in detail everything you consider your responsibility.*

Do this for your work, your marriage/relationship, the raising of your children, and your interactions with siblings, friends and parents. Make a clear and detailed list of what you believe to be your responsibilities in these areas. Next to your responsibilities, outline what you believe to be other people's responsibilities in the same areas. If you share some responsibilities, roughly mark out

what percentage of the responsibility is yours. And then mark out the percentage responsibility of others.

For example, if you have shared responsibilities in your job, work out what is yours – the bit that was set at the beginning of the job when the role was given to you. You may be surprised at how much extra responsibility you have taken on without questioning it. Once you've done this, try to understand exactly what you hoped to gain by taking on this extra responsibility. It may be that you were hoping your boss would notice how much extra you've been prepared to take on. In the role of the fixer, our extra responsibilities rarely get acknowledged or even noticed!

Now that you've identified areas where you take on too much responsibility, become more aware in everyday life how you act out that role. When you find yourself being over-responsible, stop, step back and notice your mood. Do you feel annoyed that you've done something nice for someone and they've taken no notice? Or do you feel hurt that they haven't thanked you? Have you ignored your own needs at the same time?

Making changes might be frightening to begin with. Will the other person still like me? Will old friends still speak to me if I stop putting them first? Will my parents chastise me for not being good enough? It takes some personal courage to step out of type. But it's what will move you away from depression.

Stop making assumptions. It's important to realize that when we're depressed we do a lot of assuming about what others think. We believe we can mind-read! And we adjust our actions to avert those thoughts we think others have. Of course all of this is supposition. It's an old habit and hard to break, but it's essential to regain our self-confidence. So as you make a decision NOT to fix someone else, frame the thoughts you think another person is going to have about you.

*These thoughts are actually your thoughts.*

They are what you would think if you were on the receiving end of you. So now you have to replace those assumptions with some positive thoughts.

For example, if you were asked to look after your friend's child for the day and you didn't want to, you could say 'No, I'm sorry I'm unable to help out.' But you may hesitate and suppose that your friend would think you were unkind. That thought... your friend would think you were unkind... is not the friend's thought; it is your thought. That's you telling yourself that it would be unkind not to help your friend. So you might say 'yes' because you didn't want your friend to think badly of you. However, that whole dialogue has taken place without the friend even knowing about it. That's where we mess with our own heads and end up feeling resentful for doing something we didn't want to do.

Another example is if you try to help your girlfriend who's drinking too much. You know what's right for her and that's for her to stop drinking all together. You haven't asked her, but you know you're right. You search carefully about how to get her to stop drinking, contact the doctor or Alcoholics Anonymous or book her into rehab (at your expense) and feel fantastic when she dries out. However, a few weeks down the line she's fallen off the wagon and is right back where she started, happily drunk. You, on the other hand, are outraged. After all you've done - and paid for - for her, she has the audacity to throw it back in your face and start drinking again!

So there are two examples that go from the sublime to the ridiculous. All of our own doing. So how do we change it?

## **Activity 2: Learning to say yes and no**

Setting clear personal boundaries is the key to helping our

relationships become mutually respectful. The more boundaries we set, the more our self-worth increases. Setting boundaries can be firm, but also gentle. We don't need to alienate others, but we do need to set limits for acceptable behavior with those around us.

When I began this work I didn't have a clue what my boundaries were. I wobbled all over the place trying to figure them out. Essentially, I didn't know myself – so how the hell could I know my boundaries? This activity helped me to clarify when I said 'yes' when I didn't want to, and how I could learn to say 'no' without feeling ashamed.

How we say yes when we don't want to

1. Start by making a decision to put yourself first for the next two weeks.
2. Make a note of all the things you need to do to tick the 'my responsibilities' list from activity one.
3. Next, make a list of all the things you would like to do with the time (and resources) you have left that will nourish you. This might be arranging some childcare so you can go out with friends, attend three yoga classes a week, cook up your favorite foods, play football in the park, spend every moment beautifying yourself, dig over the garden, spend time on your relationship, or anything else.
4. Choose the top three priorities and write them on a piece of paper and stick it where you can see it.
5. For the next two weeks make a note of how many times you agree to do something which isn't on your priority list.

You will be surprised at how many times you said 'yes' to something

that wasn't on your list. It's hard to change a lifetime's habit, but then, it's harder being depressed for a long time. The thing to remember is that a happier you is better for everyone else around you.

Here's how to say no

1. Make a note of all the things you don't want to do over the next two weeks. These could be a commitment you want to give up, an appointment you don't want to keep, or a meal you don't want to eat. Imagine there would be no negative consequences if you said no to any of these things.
2. Prioritize them so you get to your top three and write them on a piece of paper, sticking it somewhere you can see it.
3. Start with the smallest no and practice that until you feel comfortable about moving on to the bigger ones.

The biggest hurdle you will face is to overcome guilt. Instead of racking your head with guilt, see it as your first step towards a new life. Guilt will happen, but it doesn't mean you have to act on it. You can explain to others that you are taking better care of yourself and consequently you've had to change your priorities. Anyone worth his or her salt is going to respect this change and be supportive. You can overcome any remaining guilt through mindful meditation and radical acceptance – tools that are at the end of this step.

## **Healing our victim/perpetrator with mindfulness**

We begin to abandon the victim/perpetrator role by becoming more honest with ourselves. We become an observer of our behavior and, if we think about people whom we have uncomfortable relationships with, we can ask ourselves which role we are playing. We don't need to mend it; we only need to become aware of it. Becoming aware of our behavior is mindfulness at its best. We notice what is happening rather than reacting to it, and we watch how we're about to get hooked back in. Being mindful of our behavior is the most

powerful way to stop us walking blindly into these roles.

When we practice being mindful in difficult relationships, we don't need to judge anyone else's behavior. What we need to do is become accountable for our own thoughts and feelings and the behaviors that keep us stuck in these roles. If we take care of our feelings, and ourselves all our problems are resolved. If we expect others to take care of their feelings and problems, we stop trying to fix them. It doesn't take long to step off the seesaw and see that we don't need to try and sort other people's lives out. In our mind, they become responsible for themselves (even though they already were), which means our load is lightened.

When we suffer from depression we tend to worry about what other people think of us or we assume other people think badly of us. The truth is, what other people think of us is none of our business. Just as what we think of other people is none of their business. Our business is to change ourselves so that we feel good about ourselves; that is our business.

Another thing we do is to beat ourselves up for making a mistake. But consider this, if a child you loved dearly made a simple mistake in something he said or did, would you beat him up? No! You would ruffle his hair and tell him it was OK and that he will learn from his mistake. That's what you have to do for you.

### **Activity 3: How to reduce your reactive responses**

This is an activity to get you thinking how you react – or over-react – to others. When we over-react we are coming from a victim viewpoint. We think we're at the mercy of others. But we're not, unless we've given them permission. We can, instead, make a conscious decision to stop feeling at the mercy of others because we're not helpless and we always have a choice.

Open your journal and write down the answers to these questions. Take your time. It can be done over days, or weeks, and if you redo the exercise at a later date you may have different perspectives. These questions may seem tough, but we have to be a little tough from time to time. Being gentle all the time won't work. We need to be objective about our behavior and how it's getting us into trouble. We have to change certain behaviors because they are harming us. These questions are designed to get you thinking about which role you take on; they are exploratory and not definitive.

Answer them gently and in the spirit of needing understanding, not to self-criticize. They will help you feel more in control of your responses to difficult scenarios.

- Who do I want to be responsible for me?
- What do I want them to do for me, or give me?
- How does my body respond when I look to someone to rescue me? ``What statements do I use that make me behave like a victim?
- What does it feel like to be at the mercy of another's response?
- How can I learn to handle saying no to another person?
- What beliefs do I have about being allowed to say no? What examples can I think of when I'm stuck on the seesaw?
- Do I identify more with the victim or perpetrator?
- What role am I in when I get angry?
- How can I increase caring for myself?
- How do I deal with conflict?

Here's a list of things I can consider to handle situations better:

- How can I be more responsible for my emotions?
- How can I find the courage to be more honest with safe people?
- How do I reject others?
- Have I placed unrealistic expectations on others?
- Have I been inappropriately angry with others?



- How can I use that energy to propel me out of depression?
- Am I ready to be more vulnerable with others?

One very simple way of moving from a responsibility standpoint to having response-ability is to change your vocabulary. Here are a few examples:

<i>Instead of saying</i>	<i>Say</i>
I'll never be able to stand up to them.	I haven't yet stood up to them but I'm working towards it.
I'll never get the job I want.	I haven't got the job I want yet but I'm two positions away from my ideal job.
I can't.	I choose not to.
I mustn't.	I won't at the moment.
I'll never.	Not right now.
I'll always.	I am for now but it won't be forever.

You can see that the first set of statements is limiting and closed, with no way forward. The second set of statements are open, and allow for change, growth and flexibility. By taking a moment before clicking into that knee-jerk reaction, we are better able to get a rational take on a situation and be response-able.



Stepping off the seesaw helps us to become more self-aware, grow up emotionally and beat depression faster. Once we have gained the awareness of our behavior and changed from taking responsibility to being response-able, the game of seesaw is over!

## Visualization

This visualization is to help us move away from the victim/persecutor thinking and anchor ourselves in our own conscious awareness. It includes an anchoring technique based on a Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) tool. Remember, the dots mean a pause. It lasts 10 minutes and is for anyone who struggles in a relationship and wants to find their own strength. It's best to record it into a device you can listen to in safety and comfort. Our own voice is usually the best voice to listen to because it speaks directly to the unconscious part of us.

Settle down in a comfortable chair sitting upright with your feet on the floor. Make sure you are in a room where you can't be disturbed . . . .

Now bring your attention to your breath . . . . and feel the rise and fall of the abdomen as your breath moves in and out. Sit here for a moment and let your breath be your guide . . . .

As you breathe in and out . . . . you may notice your mind is wandering off in thoughts . . . . or that you experience physical sensations in your body . . . . Simply escort your mind back to the breath and feel the breath going in . . . . and out . . . . and in . . . . and out . . . .

Now bring your attention into your body . . . . become aware of the physical sensations in your body . . . . especially the centre of your body. . . as if a piece of rope was connecting you from the sky to the earth . . . . and running all the way through your body . . .



. from the sky down into your head. . . .and neck. . . .and back. . .  
.and abdomen. . . .and bottom. . . .and pulling tight so you have to  
sit up straight . . . .

Bring your attention back to your breath . . . . moving in through  
the nose and out through the mouth . . . .

Now imagine you are in the middle of the seesaw . . . . and at each  
end are the victim . . . . and persecutor . . . . you are standing in the  
middle of this seesaw . . . .

Bring your awareness back to your breath . . . . going in. . . .and  
going out. . . .and as you stand strong in the middle of the see-  
saw . . . . you can see the roles being played out on each end of the  
seesaw . . . . these roles are being played out by you and another  
person . . . . but at this point you are not affected by what is being  
played out . . . . you are simply observing what is going on . . . .  
whilst you pay attention to your breath . . . . coming in and your  
breath going out . . . . trying not to judge or criticize what is going  
on on the see-saw. . . .it is simply your job to be aware of it . .

As you stand strong in the middle of the seesaw you become still  
and calm . . . . there is no movement no thought and no reaction . .  
. . you simply accept the roles being played out on the seesaw . . . .  
while you stand completely still in the middle .

And if you take a look under the seesaw you will see that the  
bottom of the rope has gone through the seesaw and turned into  
a steel rope . . . . and is embedded in a steel core which in turn is  
entrenched into the earth . . . . that rope is holding you in place . . . .  
strong and powerful. . . .and in control. . .

You are the master of your own destiny . . . . you no longer need  
others to define you

Feel the power inside you . . . . and feel the release of any need to

meet other people's demands . . . .

Feel the strength that power brings to you . . . .  
And now bring your left thumb and your left index finger together  
and press them hard . . . . while you feel this powerful energy  
inside you . . . . and stay with this feeling for as long as you want to  
allow it to feed you and nourish you and love you

With your finger and thumb pressing together and anchoring this  
feeling. . . .you can come back any time. . . .to this special,  
powerful place.

Repeat this visualization once a day for at least seven days. Once  
you've established the 'anchor' you can use this technique to make a  
big difference in your ability to deal with people. Instead of hoping  
you will feel response-able when you next need to express yourself,  
just bring together your index finger and thumb which will drop  
your anchor and bring you to the same feeling you had in the  
visualization.

## **Affirmations**

*No one can think for me, feel for me or give meaning to my life except me.*

*I will learn to pause before I respond to another. I no longer need to play  
the old games of knee-jerk reactions. I won't worry about what others think  
of me.*

*Managing my over-reactions can help me to rebalance and stop me from  
bouncing from high to low and back to high again.*

*When I respond instead of react, I am able to respond with dignity and  
grace.*



## DEPRESSIONCURES:

What Your Doctor Won't Tell You

*I will feel comfortable with not knowing and understanding that I have limited control over life. I cannot control outputs, only inputs.*

*No one can experience my life for me. My journey is unique to me.*

*I don't need to pretend I'm helpless or hopeless to avoid having my own point of view.*

## CHAPTER 16 BODYWORK

### Bodywork

*How depression affects the body and how to heal it*

Anyone who has experienced the blight of depression also understands the toll it takes on the body. In the midst of a full-blown depressive period, the very last thing we worry about is our physical well-being. I remember that some days just waking up and finding I was still alive seemed like such a miracle. Forget trying to remember to shop for fruit and vegetables, as well, that's just not going to happen! But what if you discovered that taking care of your body was going to help you beat depression faster? Would that have any impact on how you take care of yourself?

Interestingly, health isn't just affected by the way we tend to abuse our bodies with certain behaviors when we're depressed, such as excessive drinking, eating disorders, over-exercising, drugs, junk food and inactivity being common. Depression affects us physically for other reasons, as well. They are:

- Stored physical memories
- The mind-body connection
- Chronic stress

Let's explore these in turn and look at ways we can re-address the imbalance in the body without having to run a marathon or turn into a macrobiotic fanatic.

I will also introduce you to two other techniques to help repair the physical body:

- Breath work
- Anchoring the body

Three ways depression affects the body

## **1: Stored physical memories**

Many sufferers from depression also suffer from physical symptoms. This has a medical name: somatoform. It's the result of the body storing pain. You may have suffered from somatoform without realizing it. Perhaps you have gone to the doctor to have some tests and then felt puzzled when the tests came back negative because you know you don't feel well. The symptoms can't be traced to a specific physical cause yet the pain you feel is very real. This pain can manifest as aches, chronic illness or physical tension. As we saw in Step 4, *Discovering Your Inner Child*, the body stores memories and these memories signal themselves with automatic responses even if we don't consciously link them with a specific memory. Have you ever smelled a perfume and immediately been transported back in time? Or how about a certain song that suddenly reminds you of where you were years ago? It happens in a split-second. We might experience a feeling of déjà vu even though we can't consciously recall the memory. It has been explained as an event experienced as a sensory input and then stored into memory even though the conscious part of the brain has wiped out all details. When the same sensory trigger is released, the mind transports us back instantly, regardless of whether the memory is positive or negative.

The negative stored memory is activated when something happens to trigger the familiar but forgotten original sensory input. We might flinch when someone raises their arm to scratch their head or we get a lurch in our stomach if someone raises their voice. On a longer-term footing, if we're living under certain conditions which unknowingly remind us of old negative memories, we may be suffering from chronic physical discomfort.

## Bodywork

For example, let's look at the story of Sally. When she was eight, Sally's father lost his job and she had to move from her house and leave her school. She then lost her network of friends. A few months later the ongoing rows between her parents led to them splitting up. Sally knew that the loss of income contributed to this entire chain of events, but as it happened so long ago, she had forgotten all about it. However, lately Sally's been struggling to make ends meet, and her current experiences are triggering stored memories and the associated stresses without her having any real idea what's happening. For Sally, and for all of us, the body continues to react to something that happened long ago, because something still lives inside us, right in the nerve cells.

When things go wrong and we suffer from depression, old memories come to the surface. When we ruminate on how bad things are now, without knowing it we invite the memories to wake up. Our hopelessness can tell us that there's no point in trying to get better because that's the way depression works. We're in a familiar place, even though we don't know why. We can feel completely powerless. We become quite ashamed of these old feelings because we don't understand them. We don't know where they've come from and it makes us frightened. The pain feels like an alien, jumping out when it's not wanted. We may think we are going mad and end up isolating ourselves.

These stored memories are often the source of aches and pains, stiff necks, bumps and lumps, stomach aches, insomnia, incredible fatigue, night sweats, panic attacks, anxiety attacks and chronic depression. We may also become very obsessive or display compulsive behaviors. If you've suffered from chronic depression you may have suffered from similar traits.



Let's look at two ways to relieve these deep and painful memories: stored memory activity and a tool called EFT.

Stored memory activity

This activity is designed to link stored memories and a current incident that may have upset you. It's designed to release old memories which will help you to feel lighter and beat depression faster.

Open your journal and roughly draw out the headings as below. Here are two examples of stored memories and their effects:

CURRENT INCIDENT	THE SENSATION/ FEELING IT CREATED IN ME	THE MEMORY IT'S LINKED TO FROM THE PAST	WHAT I LEARNED AT THE TIME	THE REALITY OF WHAT HAPPENED
I saw a child being slapped in a shop.	Tension and anger, feeling futile.	My parent's slapping me and I couldn't do anything.	I thought I was useless and I felt victimized.	I say they were inappropriate in the way they disciplined me.
A work colleague told me a piece of work was not up to scratch for a presentation.	Sinking feeling in my stomach, felt sick, head hanging down.	Unable to understand any of my schoolwork.	I was thick.	I wasn't motivated to work and I got into trouble for it but I moved schools every two terms so I could never keep up and that wasn't my fault.

Complete this activity whenever an incident throws you. You will gradually build a picture of your memory store so you will be able to bring in a reality check every time you find yourself upset about something that happened and you don't know why. The more you do this, the quicker you will bring yourself up to speed and old memories will no longer drive your reactions to things that happen today.

If you have the resources, you may want to try other approaches to heal old memories. There's a whole school of thought that says that other kinds of Bodywork therapies can greatly help people who suffer from depression, stored memories and associated aches and pains. Massage, acupuncture, shiatsu, craniosacral therapy, Alexander technique, reflexology and reiki are among many therapies that can help release old pain through physical touch.

There is one therapy that can be done straight away which seems to be growing in popularity and helps people through emotional turmoil. It's called the 'emotional freedom technique' (EFT). This technique is a form of psychological acupressure, which is based on the same energy channels used in traditional acupuncture. Acupuncture has been used with incredible success for more than 5,000 years. It's still used extensively to treat sick people in Chinese hospitals and is gathering pace here in the West as an alternative medical treatment for various ailments, including back problems.

EFT works by a simple tapping with the fingertips to input kinetic energy to specific meridians on the head and chest while thinking about a specific problem. It uses positive affirmations at the same time. The combination of tapping the meridians and the positive affirmations works to clear the stored memories and emotional blocks from your body's energy system. It is said to restore the mind/body balance completely if done properly. There's no definitive research to prove this, but it's certainly gaining credibility in helping people with emotional distress. There are many demonstrations on how

to perform this technique on YouTube, and it's simply a matter of watching one or two videos to understand how to do it properly.

## **2: Mind-body-emotion connection**

The mind-body-emotion connection is a three-way relationship. Emotion is the result of the mind and body connecting. Here is a simple way to demonstrate the connection:

Imagine now, if you will, that the one thing you want in your life has just happened. You've won the lottery. Your friend, with whom you've had a horrid argument, turns up unexpectedly with an apology and a beer, or you've been given the all clear on a worrying health problem. Can you feel the change in your body? A little lighter? Or happier? However, it works the other way, too. Imagine a less pleasant scenario like something happens to your pet, or you lose your home; the response in the body is not pleasant. It may be a lurch in the stomach or even heart palpitations. (OK, stop thinking like that right now!)

If you suffer from chronic depression, there is a tendency to think negatively and this creates a lot of unhelpful emotions that make us more depressed.

The only thing we ever deal with is a thought

The thing that kicks off this whole cycle is a thought. A thought is the only thing we are ever dealing with. Depression is the result of a large accumulation of negative thoughts and no matter what problems we have, our experiences are only the outer effects of our inner thoughts. All of our experiences in our lifetime up into this point have been created by our thoughts. Even self-hate is only a thought like 'I am a horrible person.' Thoughts produce feelings and we believe the feelings. However, if we don't have the thought, we won't have the feeling. The feeling is an automatic response to

the thought, but more importantly, the whole process is a chronic resistance to acceptance.

For example, we may be frustrated or resentful because we have to do something we don't want to do. All the energy of the unspoken resentment towards someone else is so polluted that it harms us more than it harms anyone else. Then all we think about is how annoyed we are, and more emotions are stirred up to create inner conflict. This reaction is an unwillingness to accept things as they are, which creates negative emotions. At this point it doesn't really matter whether we are right or wrong, whether or not the feelings are justified, or whether these thoughts are correct. The fact is, we're resisting this very moment and thereby creating constant conflict. This conflict is like a pollutant, poisoning us and those around us. There's nothing that feeds depression faster than a stream of pollutants!

### Come into the present moment

If we come into this present moment, in this split-second and this split-second and this split-second, we instantly stop the mind affecting our emotions. The mind is trying to spin off into the past or the future, but we can stop 'thinking' and bring our awareness into now. We can gently ask ourselves: What's going on inside me at this moment? We can bring our attention into our body and scan our body for sensation, tension or emotion.

The mind will go crazy trying to compete with the attention we are giving the body. But our attention on the body is pulling us away from the frenetic mind. This action takes the power away from the mind and it reacts like a trapped animal. It tries to think us out of our present awareness. We can step away from our mind and look at it as if it were a spinning roundabout. We no longer have to see the world through our mind, but through our body awareness. This is where the seat of our inner power lives. If we practice being in this



moment, if only for a split second, that split-second will grow to a whole second, three seconds and by the time we get to a minute, we have reached nirvana!

#### Body Meditation

The following meditation is a simple way of reconnecting yourself with your body. It may be a good idea to record this meditation with your own voice.

Settle down in a comfortable, safe place lying on your bed or somewhere you won't be disturbed . . . .

Wrap up in a rug or something to make you cozy. . . .

When you are comfortable close your eyes . . . .

Now bring your attention to your breath . . . . and feel the rise and fall of the abdomen as your breath moves in and out. . . .

Lie here for a moment and let your breath be your guide . . . . As you breathe in and out . . . . you may notice your mind is wandering off in thoughts . . . . or that you experience physical sensations in your body . .

. . simply escort your mind back to the breath and feel the breath going in . . . . and out....and in....and out....

This is a meditation to be fully aware of your body . . . . your experience. It's not about trying to change anything . . . . or trying to relax . . . . but the intention of this meditation is to

bring your awareness to the sensations in your body as you touch each part of it with your attention . . . .

Bring your attention back to the rising and falling of your abdomen . . . . and get a sense of the sensation of the rise and the sensation of the fall as your breath moves in and out of your body . . . .

Bring your attention now to your feet and ankles and wrap them up in a ball of light . . . . and feel the connectedness between the ankles and the balls of the feet . . . .

Now focus your attention on your toes . . . . and imagine your attention as a magic wand . . . . and go in and out of all ten toes feeling the sensation of each toe as you touch it with your attention . . . .

Now draw your attention to the balls of the feet . . . . and bring your attention down to the heels . . . . and now wrap your attention around your ankles . . . . feel the lightness around the whole of your foot and ankle . . . . and let your attention linger on the sensation that surrounds your feet and ankles . . . .

When you are ready, bring your attention to your calves and your shins and allow your awareness to expand through the whole of the lower part of your leg. . . .swirling around the top of the ankles. . . .and up to the top part of your lower leg. . . .let your awareness stay with your whole lower leg . . . . Notice the sensation you feel . . . . and accept the sensation because there's no need to change anything . . . .

Continue up your body when you're ready . . . . move on to your knees. . . .and your pelvic area. . . .and your hips . . . . and your lower back and abdomen and your upper back and chest . . . . then your neck and shoulders. . . .and now your upper arms. . . .your lower arms. . . .your hands and your head. . . .your mouth . . . . your nose . . . . and cheeks . . . . and eyes and crown of the head, becoming aware of all sensations and anything you may be resisting . . . . just bring your awareness into that more than anywhere else . . . . You can dissolve any tension using the breath . . . . by flushing the whole

body with your full awareness starting from the crown of the head  
....

With the in breath take your attention all the way down to your feet  
and with your out breath bring your attention from your feet all the  
way back up to the top of your head . . . .

Rest here until you are ready to open your eyes.

### **3: Dealing with chronic stress**

There is a specific link between depression and stress. Not all of us suffer from acute stress when we are depressed, but as a rule, we all suffer from more stress than is good for us. We are becoming tolerant of higher stress levels: Fifty years ago if someone had walked into a doctor's surgery with modern-day 'normal' stress levels, they would have been diagnosed with a major stress disorder! Even if we're not a 'stressy' type, our higher stress levels could simply be put down to modern life. With the pace accelerating all the time, it's hard not to be affected by our 24/7 lifestyle. By decreasing our stress levels, even if we think we don't feel stressed, we're going to beat depression faster.

What exactly is stress? It's a reflex that causes the heart to pound, creates butterflies in the stomach or coldness in the chest. This is an automatic response to a perceived threat. The threat doesn't even have to be real. As long as we think there is a threat, our body will react even if the threat is imagined. This instinctive stress response is known as 'fight or flight', a hard-wired reaction to perceived threats to our survival. When survival meant facing immediate and real threats such as confronting a charging lion, this response saved our lives. When our body senses danger, its innate intelligence automatically takes charge by triggering a set of changes that bypass our rational thoughts. Priority is given to all physical functions that provide more power to face an enemy or to flee. The hormone

adrenaline released at this time is fast-acting and powerful and activates this 'fight- flight' mechanism in the body, causing blood to flow away from the main organs to the limbs, stopping digestion and causing the heart to beat faster. It belongs to a group of hormones called catecholamines that help keep the body in a high state of alert. Charging lions are no longer a concern, unless you happen to be living in the wild! But the fight or flight response still works even though now it is triggered by different, seemingly less life-threatening events. Many day-to-day situations can set it off: changing homes, a difficult boss, divorce, separation, demanding children, traffic jams, the fear of terrorism and others. The more often we are exposed to these types of stresses, the more over- active our fight or flight response becomes until we find ourselves operating at fever-pitch level, constantly prepared for battle, perceiving potential threats everywhere. That is why people who are over-stressed not only show physiological symptoms such as high blood pressure, rapid heart rate or shallow fast breath; they can seem overly sensitive or aggressive. Today, many of us don't get enough physical exercise to 'burn off' the effects of our response and we're left with stress build-up. We learn to control our reactions, but this does not counteract the stress response.

How stressed are you?

Before we go any further, let's see if you are vulnerable to stress with this checklist from the Stress Management Society. Grab your journal and mark yourself from 1 (always applies to you) to 5 (never applies to you) to each statement:

- I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.
- I get seven to eight hours of sleep at least four nights a week.
- I have at least one person who lives nearby from whom I can ask a favor.
- I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.
- I do not smoke.
- I drink fewer than five alcoholic drinks a week.

- I am the appropriate weight for my height.
- I drink fewer than two cups of coffee, tea or cola a day.
- I have a network of friends, family and acquaintances on whom I can rely.
- I confide in at least one person in my network about personal matters.
- I am generally in good health.
- I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry, stressed or worried.
- I do something for fun at least once a week.
- I recognize stress symptoms.
- I take quiet time for myself during the day.

Now add up your scores and take away 15.

Under 5: you are chilled. Skip this step!

5-20: If you are between 5 and 20 then you have life in fairly good control, but you do still have a vulnerability to stress and your body's 'shock absorbers' will need to deal with stress in a healthy non-aggressive way.

20 – 50: If your score is between 20 and 50, then you are approaching the danger zone and you are vulnerable to stress . . . your relationships may be strained and you may not be operating from your most resourceful state.

50+: If your score is over 50, your stress level is very high and your health and well-being are in danger. You have potentially a lot of stress in your life but few ways to deal with it.

What is the link between stress and depression?

Well, they are entirely different, but work together to make us feel . . . well . . . not so good and this starts off with feeling a lack of control.

Do know that feeling when you're trying to hang on to people or things or situations and they keep slipping away from you? This is incredibly common when we feel depressed and it makes us unable to see a way of making things better. As our hopelessness increases our stress levels increase, too, and once our stress goes up, we start to sleep badly and wake up feeling exhausted. This makes us more depressed, which leads to negative thinking and beating ourselves up. In turn, we develop unhealthy habits like eating junk food or drinking or smoking a lot, which makes us more depressed and feeling more out of control – which starts the whole cycle over again. But I'm sure you also know how you feel when you wake up rested and refreshed after a good night's sleep. That's where we want to get to and that's why it's important to tackle stress levels before anything else.



*The stress and depression cycle*

## **H.A.L.T. - An instant destressor**

Let's look at some triggers that can catapult us into a low mood at lightening speed. These are when we become:

### **hungry, angry, lonely and tired**

all at the same time. Because we're depressed, we also don't necessarily take good care of ourselves and allow ourselves to get into this state. Here's a further explanation of each state.

**Hungry:** of course, describes the most obvious physical condition of lack of food. We all know how important it is to have regular nutritious meals but did you know that the wrong foods could actually increase your stress levels? Start by limiting caffeine because that's one 'quick fix' that can make you burn and crash.

**Angry:** we also mean frustration, irritation, bottled-up feelings, resentment, fury and so on. Feeling angry and not being able to do anything about it leads to huge stress and depression, so a quick approach to this is to see anger as an expression of an unmet need. What this means is that something you feel angry about could so easily be resolved by some action.

If you find yourself frustrated and stressed at work . . . what do you need to make that better? Perhaps you're frustrated with the kids . . . what do you need to make your life more manageable? Most of us have never learned how to express anger constructively, so this can be quite a challenge . . . but you may feel liberated if you take your needs seriously.

**Lonely:** loneliness is very common in people who are stressed and depressed because we find it hard to reach out. But that old phrase, a problem shared is a problem halved, has never been truer because when you share your thoughts and feelings, you can unload and lighten up.

So, instead of having that extra glass of wine or switching on the TV for the evening, why not pick up the phone and talk to an old friend, or join a group, 12-step meeting or club that will get you connecting with others and having some fun as well as reducing your loneliness.

**Tired:** there are many forms of tiredness that come from depression and stress. However, the one thing that guarantees an energy boost is exercise. Exercise really is an effective mood booster and it doesn't have to mean dragging yourself to the gym. You could ride a bike, dig the garden or go for a walk or a swim. Exercise boosts our endorphin levels, the 'happy hormones' that give up that good feeling when we get up and get moving.

## **HALT**

Of course, putting these four altered states together and even the most noble of self-carers will find it difficult to fight off a low mood. So if we are stressed and depressed, it's worth making a note of our physical and emotional state at that moment.

Often, when I'm stressed, I'll automatically think HALT and I quickly realize that the conditions I've put myself into aren't conducive to my happiness, and I need to take better care of myself. Just acknowledging that is like an instant de-stressor.

### A de-stress meditation

Here's a meditation designed to relieve stress. It's best if you listen with your own voice. Record into your phone, PC or tablet, and remember that the dots represent pauses.

Get ready now by closing your eyes . . . I want you to take a deep breath, so gently inhale and sigh it out. . . .And again. . . .Gently inhale and sigh it out . . .

Now locate a place in your body where you feel your breath most strongly – this may be your shoulder, rib cage or diaphragm or another place . . . .

Now bring your attention to it . . . . and from this place begin to observe your breath . . . . and let it do whatever it wants to do . . . . allowing your breath to do whatever it wants to do. . . .When thoughts come up. . . .don't worry just realize they have, and turn your awareness to your breath . . . . relaxing and allowing it to do whatever it wants to do . . . .

Identify where there is a stress spot in your body. . . .It could be your back or your legs or your ribs. . . .wherever that is. . . .

Now just like you did with your breath . . . . bring your attention to your stress spot and then. . . .do nothing. . . .just keep your attention on it and just allow the stress spot to do what it wants to do. . . .if thoughts come up don't worry it's fine. Just bring yourself back to your stress spot. . . .that's all you have to do. . . .

Just relax into your stress spot and if you find your attention wandering again, don't worry . . . . just bring yourself back to your stress spot and relax . . . . allowing your stress spot to do whatever it wants to do . . . .

Relax, allow and return . . . . watch how your stress spot dissolves . . . . the more you can allow it to dissolve by relaxing, the more it will dissolve . . . . relax, allow and dissolve . . . . allow your stress to dissolve itself . . . . The more you can relax and allow . . . . the more your stress spot will dissolve itself . . . .

Continue as often as you need to relieve your stress . . . . allowing, relaxing and returning . . . .

Now, open your eyes and smile because your stress levels will

be lower and you can return to this meditation any time you feel stressed and want an instant chill.

## Repairing bodywork

**1: Breath work** Breath work is an ancient ritual that helps bring together the mind and the body. The mysterious powers associated with the breath are mostly unheard of in the West, but Indian yogis developed a science around certain breathing techniques that, applied methodically over a period of time, give specific results. It's called pranayama, and it's believed to be the vital force that creates various currents of energy in the body that affect moods and levels of stress and can resolve deep emotional traumas. Recently, breath work has been used as a therapeutic tool to positively affect not only the physical aspects of our bodies, but also the emotional and spiritual aspects as well.

Think about the way we droop during a depressive episode: hunched shoulders, slumped posture, eyes down and head in the hands. Our lungs collapse, making our breathing short and shallow. This stops oxygen-rich blood from sending oxygen around the body. However, the good news is that learning to breathe again enables your lungs to expand. This makes more oxygen go into all parts of the body, which will make you feel better instantly. (Did you just take a deep breath when you read that? I did!)

There's no doubt that our emotions are linked to our breath. When we're angry, we pant, and when we're happy we have a more relaxed, open breath. People who suffer anxiety or panic attacks talk about not being able to breathe or having to gulp great lungfuls of air. If our breath changes with our emotions, then we can change our emotions with our breath. Although regular breathing is an automatic function, we can learn to breathe deeper. This can help pull more oxygen into the whole body, making us feel lighter and calmer, which can help us feel more centered.

This next activity helps to balance the breath. It's easy to do, can be done anywhere, any time, gives fast results and you could see a difference in literally two minutes. You can do it when you're travelling, at work, before going to bed or anywhere in which you have a few minutes to yourself.

Sit in a comfortable position and place your hands on your knees. Drop your shoulders and then close your eyes. On your next breath out visualize the breath going out of your nose to the count of five. Pull in your stomach muscles to help your lungs to deflate. At the end of the breath, count for two seconds, then breathe in slowly by expanding your stomach muscles to the count of five. Repeat this between five and ten times.

## **2: Anchoring the body**

This technique involves bringing the attention into the body to create instant 'peace of mind'.

When we are depressed we can often cut ourselves off from our body because our awareness is centered in thinking, and this sets us spinning like a washing machine. We can forget we have a chest, heart and abdomen, legs and arms, hands and feet! We identify with the racing thoughts so much that we only give our body a cursory level of attention. Living in our thoughts creates an inordinate amount of stress because it constantly taps into our 'fight or flight' response and leaves us depleted of energy, wired and tired. By anchoring our awareness in our body, we can instantly turn that habit around 180 degrees.

The idea of anchoring in the body is simply to take the focus of our attention away from our mind and direct it into our body. Once our attention is directed into the body it becomes the beginning of an inward journey that will take us to the source of our peaceful inner chamber. It can also help our life feel more vibrant and powerful.

It's an extraordinary experience that can change your whole way of being because your awareness is no longer centered on your brain, but on the heart – your spirit.

Here is a mindfulness activity which can help you reconnect with your body. Record these words and play them back; your own voice is the most effective way to communicate with yourself. Remember that the dots represent a pause.

Close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing for a few seconds . . . . take a few moments to connect with your abdomen . . . . become aware of your abdomen going up and down as your breath flows in and out . . . .

Bring your attention into your body and feel it from the inside out . . . . don't think, simply feel the body . . . . If you start to think simply escort your attention from your mind . . . . back down through your face . . . . through your neck . . . . through your chest and into your abdomen – the core. . . .

Now as you focus your attention on the core . . . . a strong feeling will begin to vibrate . . . . right where your attention is focused . . . . See this sensation in the middle of you as a white ball. . . .which is growing. . . .the more attention you give it . . . .

See this light spreading out from the centre of your core . . . . it's filtering down into your lower abdomen, down your thighs . . . . into your lower legs . . . . and into your feet . . . . all the way to the end of your toes . . . .

See the light moving up into your chest cavity. . . .now into your neck. . . .up into the back of your head . . . . all the way to the top and down into your face and ears . . . .

Sense the light moving through your shoulders . . . . and down your

arms to your elbows. . . .and into your lower arms. . . .and through your hands to your fingers . . . .

Now come back to the light. . . .in your abdomen. . . .Stay with the focus on this light . . . . and you will begin to see the energy emanating from the middle of you and spreading out and down through your legs . . . . up into your chest and head . . . . and all the way down your arms. . . .

You may feel a slight tingling. . . .this is the vibration of the energy . . . .it's connected to the source of the universal energy . . . .Stay with this energy for a few more moments . . . .

Now think about your dominant hand . . . . press the index finger and thumb together . . . . in your mind, connect the energy from your finger and thumb towards the energy in the centre of you . . . . See a strong white line join the two . . . . wherever your hand, moves the line follows . . . .

Visualize the line getting stronger . . . . see the source of the light in your centre sending energy to your fingers like a powerful pulse . . . . Relax your hands now and gently open your eyes.

You now have an anchor from your power source to your conscious world. Whenever you remember, reconnect yourself to this power source with your finger and thumb. It will bring you back to your centre and away from your mind. When you stop for a few minutes, instead of thinking about something you have to do later, simply escort your attention back into the body and anchor it. After you sit down and before you switch on the TV, or when you get in the car and shut the door, or after you've jumped on the bus . . . just pause and bring your attention back into your body. This becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because the more you do it, the more fantastic it feels.

There is a direct and fast correlation between bringing your attention into the body and the release of the feel-good hormones. Once you begin to do this activity on a regular basis the next step is always to have 10 percent of your attention focused on your body; even when you are having a conversation with another person, learn to keep 10 percent of your attention in your body. You will build deep roots inside you, building self-confidence, happiness and a better perspective on life.

### **Affirmations**

*I trust in the process of life, which leaves me free to become friends with my body.*

*I lovingly take care of my body, it is my friend and it is the divine expression of me.*

*I create new patterns, which serve to bring me peace, harmony and vitality.*

## CHAPTER 17

# MINDFULNESS

*Stopping the madness of mind racing*

One thing we all do when we're depressed – we think. But it's not just any old thinking; this is real hard-core thinking. And it's not just real hard-core thinking, it's that we do it at a frightening speed. It's called 'mind racing' and it's what happens when we let our mind run free. Mind racing is constantly playing back different scenarios with different outcomes of what could have been or might be. It's a major energy drain, but we do it without realizing it. It keeps us from being in the present moment and acts as a shield from our depression. If we were driving during a bout of mind racing we could drive a hundred miles without necessarily remembering how we got there. That's what depressive thinking does: takes you out of reality and into an unreal world.

### **The medics call it rumination**

The medical profession actually has a word for this type of thinking. It's called rumination. Rumination is when someone goes over and over and over negative thoughts. It's actually a compulsive, focused attention on our distress, its possible causes and consequences. When we are in the middle of full-blown mind racing, we only see problems. Once we get into this very negative form of thinking it interferes with our ability to see any light at the end of the tunnel.

Research shows that our tendency to try and think our way out of the depression is harmful, and could make us more depressed. Overthinking is also linked to negative behavior like self-harming, binge eating and drinking, and general anxiety. We try to think our way out of our depression but we're actually driving ourselves further into its clutches. Mind racing can be experienced as a background 'white noise' and can take over a person's ability to be aware of

what is going on. Mind racing also seems to be very repetitive and overwhelming, which results in losing track of time.

Generally, mind racing is when the mind brings up random thoughts and memories and switches between them very quickly; we have no control over it. Usually the thoughts are focused on one or two things, but at the same time, they pop out randomly. If we suffer from mind racing we can't easily slow down these thought patterns and it can begin to affect our health. Mind racing can disrupt sleep patterns, which pushes up stress levels. It also keeps us in a crisis by going over and over imagined threats. Somehow, and this is the crazy part, we think it's doing us good. We imagine the worst possible scenario so that if we ever have to face it for real, we'll be ready!

Here's a quick quiz to see if you suffer from a racing mind:

1. Do you find yourself automatically thinking about problems when you're doing things that allow your mind to be on idle, like cleaning, driving or trying to fall asleep?
2. Do you find meditation tricky because thoughts bombard you? Would others suggest that you love drama and that if you don't have one you either create one or get in the middle of someone else's?
3. Do you ever wake up in the middle of the night and can't get back to sleep because you're thinking so much? Are you a glass half-empty kind of person thinking that things won't work out rather than that things will work out?
4. When you think about things in your life that upset you, do you feel overwhelmed, stressed and depressed, and then focus on those feelings too?

5. When you're dealing with a conflict with another person, do you find yourself working into a fury but feel like you can't do anything about it, and then feel worse?

6. If you talk with your friends about a situation that makes you angry, upset or stressed, do you prefer to have your friends see it your from your side and then get upset if they don't?

If you've answered yes to four or more of these questions, then you may well suffer from mind racing.

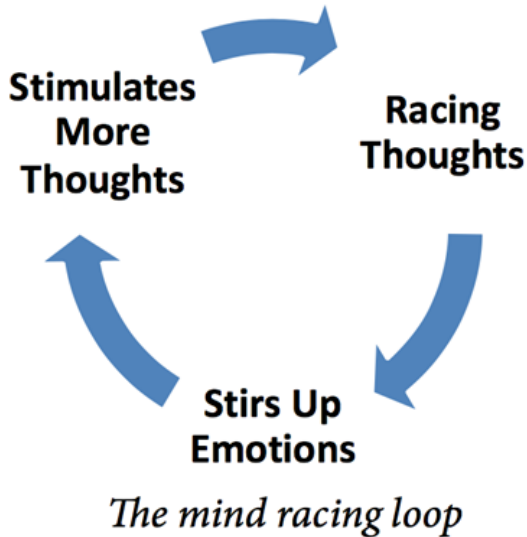
### **Negative default position**

There is an added disadvantage for anyone who has previously suffered from a deep depression. Depression makes a connection in the brain between mind racing and a sad mood. It's like a line drawn in the sand and any normal sadness can take us back behind that line in the sand – our default position – without us even trying. Studies have shown this to be the case and it helps us to understand why, when we feel sad, we give up on ourselves so easily.

For some of us, no matter how well we are doing when we trip up, we don't seem to go just one step back; we seem to slide all the way down the bottom – like sliding down the snake of the Snakes and Ladders board back to the starting point. Sometimes it seems we just can't get ourselves out of the depression no matter what we do. This can add to our feeling of hopelessness and helplessness.

### **So what happens?**

Mind racing is a psychic disease (or dis-ease.) It's almost an epidemic because everyone does it and it seems unstoppable. But it works in the same way for everyone. This is mind racing's method of operation.



As the mind races away in the brain, it goes over and over something: we're no good or that nothing good will ever happen to us or that we're worthless and useless. What happens, is that thought stimulates emotions like fear, anxiety, frustration, anger and panic. Those emotions then get played out and not in a good way. Emotions are essentially the body's way of reacting to the mind. For example, if we tell ourselves that we're in trouble, our bodies will go into the 'fight or flight' mode which sets up fear and anxiety. If we tell ourselves that we're totally useless, this feels punishing and we feel the negative energy in our chest or abdomen. Of course we don't intend to do this, but we do it unconsciously. The more unconscious this process is, the more it becomes apparent in the body, and if this happens day in day out, it's no wonder we feel beaten!

On its own, mind racing could cause us to get depressed. If we did nothing else except to learn how to master the mind, this could be

the only thing we need to help us beat depression fast. Sometimes the answers to the most complex problems are worryingly simple, and this is one of them. Generally speaking, anyone who suffers from depression suffers from mind racing. This mind is like a thousand dominos all setup; the mind pushes the first domino and the whole row falls down. Except they keep falling and never stop. Each thought creates an emotion until we're a series of unconscious reactions keeping us in this loop of madness. And we wonder why we are so depressed!

## A reality check

When we're depressed we work under the assumption that incessant thinking is imperative to our well being. But it isn't. Let's have a think about this!

When we think, or ruminate, we think about the same thing over and over again. This thinking is like a paralysis and prevents us from moving forward. But what are we thinking about? We think about three things.

**The past.** When we think about the past we reactivate an old memory and attach regret or remorse to it. Regret, because we've lost something we wish we still had, or remorse for something we wish hadn't happened. But that is madness because the past will never be in our life today; it can't, it's impossible.

**The future.** We project a fantasy onto what we think may come true. This projection may be good, in which case we're attaching ourselves to something that we can't have now, which causes frustration. Or it may be bad, so we attach ourselves to a whole heap of fear based on a fantasy, which may or may not come true. Again, this is madness because when the future arrives, it becomes now.

**How we feel about ourselves in this moment.** If we suffer from depression, then the chances are those thoughts are condemning and not at all helpful. 'You're useless, worthless and can't do anything right' is the kind of thing we think. This thinking triggers fear and self-hate, which stirs up more thinking.

But all three types of thought can't be resolved by more thinking. They can't be resolved at all. But what can be resolved is to stop thinking altogether.

When I first tried to stop thinking, I thought it was going to take years of practice and great discipline. At first it did. My mind was crammed with racing thoughts like a bucket full of live eels squirming all over each other with nowhere to go. I thought I had to try harder and forced myself to be more disciplined.

But it didn't work. I just thought harder! I now realize that I was simply trying too hard, but what I needed to do was not to try at all. In fact 'trying' was the block to my happiness. I realized there was nothing to try for, and by trying to be more peaceful, it was having the opposite effect. Thinking about how I could be more peaceful next week was the antithesis of what I was trying to achieve, peace – now. Once I stopped spending time and energy trying to think my way out of my problems and accepted that I would always have problems, I found the peace I was desperately seeking. This was the first step to beating depression. I'd spent so long trying to 'sort out my life'; I'd forgotten how to be in my life. I finally realized that:

*It was only a thought*

## **How to stop thinking**

Asking us how to stop thinking may seem like an extra-ordinary request. However we are on an extraordinary journey. Anyone who

has suffered from the devastation of depression knows all too well what it's like to exist on the fringe of society. When we are in the depths of suffering it seems as though we are stationary and life moves on in front of us – over there! We need to take extraordinary steps if we want to beat depression fast. Forget convention, put aside skepticism and just try this step which, if taken seriously, can reframe the rest of your life. Masters searching for enlightenment have pursued the art of no thought for thousands of years. We don't concern ourselves too much with the rationale of this step. All we need to know is that it works, and can help us beat depression fast. Read (or record and listen to) this whenever you want some peace from your frantic mind:

We stop thinking by stopping thinking. At the moment that sounds easy but it is the hardest thing in the world until we simply stop thinking about it. How do we do that? Well the first thing to do is to recognize how much we are thinking. If we think about our minds and our thoughts we can see the brain spinning like a roundabout. It moves so quickly we can't see each thought because it spins like a whirling dervish. Just take a few moments to watch the thoughts spinning around in your brain.

As you spend some time watching this roundabout of thoughts whizzing around in your brain you are beginning to step back from mind racing . . . .

Get a bit of distance between you and it. Imagine you're stepping off the roundabout and watching it . . . .

As you do this you disconnect your mind from your emotion. The negative messages stop by simply watching the mind at work 'up there' on the roundabout.

Don't try to understand the logic behind this because you start thinking again. Simply listen to these words slowly and carefully

and this will help you get some distance from the mind. It's important not to try to stop thinking because that is the judgment which comes from thinking. Learning not to think isn't something you need to work hard at, it's more like a light being switched on. There's nothing more to it than that. If you are thinking about it – just don't think. There is nothing to think about.

Whilst you're reading this passage you may be thinking this is nonsense, but that's the thinker at work. Every time you hear the thinker at work, step back and watch the roundabout spinning . . . . up there.

Thinking and practicing not thinking don't go together because you can't do both at the same time. While you're reading (or listening to) these words slowly and clearly, stop for a split-second in between each sentence and find the space before you read the next sentence. As you find a space between each sentence, bring your awareness into that space. This awareness is your still presence. . . .If a thought arises. . . just watch it . . . . don't be drawn into it.

When you catch yourself thinking you are free of thinking

Catching yourself thinking puts some space in-between you and your thoughts. If you couldn't catch yourself thinking you couldn't see that you've been thinking. If you feel frustrated at these words it's because your mind has told you you've failed. But you are not your mind, and you haven't failed. You just thought you failed. If you suffer from depression, it's because you believe everything your mind thinks. But you are not your mind, you are the space under the thoughts of your mind.

Can you feel the space in between each sentence? It's possible to think you've failed, yet also feel the space between you and your mind. If you become very still you will find that space is like a sacred emptiness in the very centre of you. But don't think about it because

the mind cannot process it. It's a different sense, like a sixth sense, awareness or even an awakening. Allow this moment to be as it is. . . this will bring you back into the still place.

One of the questions we ask ourselves is, 'What's wrong with me, why am I so depressed?' But that's our mind asking that question, it's not us. When we listen to our racing minds we are re-engaged in the dis-ease of our incessant thoughts. So, when we stop thinking, we stop the questions. There is no need to answer these questions because there's no answer and there's no question.

Simply watch the thoughts spinning around and step away from them, coming into the sacred space that's left. You may think this is total nonsense, but then you're back in your thoughts. If you continue this practice of no thinking you will reverse the mind-racing loop and it will slow down. Become aware of your breathing instead of your thoughts. Become aware of the place that has no thoughts.

If you beat yourself up because you can't not think, that's the thinker's way of hooking you back in . . . by stirring up the emotions and getting you back on the thinking loop. So the answer is to not think. In-between each sentence, find a space of no thought. As you read and re-read these words you will be able to stretch that split-second of no thought to a whole second and then two and then three. Once you hit three seconds you will touch the bliss that lies waiting for you underneath the thoughts. This is your true happiness, your true calling . . . you. You are what's left when the thoughts stop . . . the awareness away from thoughts is who you are . . . not trying to achieve anything . . . just accepting what's there . . . allowing it to be as it is.

That is all there is to say about how to stop thinking. And there is nothing else to think about.



## **Affirmations**

*Today I will cease the mind racing which drains me of self-love. It has served me well as a tool to shield against my feelings, but I no longer need this tool.*

*I am ready to accept all of me in this present moment because this is the way I can heal and come into the light and love of this present moment.*



## References:

<sup>1</sup><http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-anxiety-disorder-among-adults.shtml>

## <sup>2</sup> MEDICAL DISCLAIMER:

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You agree not to use any information in our book, including, but not limited to product descriptions, customer testimonials, etc. for the diagnosis and treatment of any health issue or for the prescription of any medication or treatment.

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You understand that such information is based upon personal experience and is not a substitute for obtaining professional medical advice. You should always consult your physician or other healthcare provider before changing your diet or starting an exercise program.

In light of the foregoing, you understand and agree that we are not liable nor do we assume any liability for any information contained within our book as well as your reliance on it. In no event shall we be liable for direct, indirect, consequential, special, exemplary, or other damages related to your use of the information contained within our book.

### <sup>3</sup> Signs and Symptoms

If you have been experiencing some of the following signs and symptoms most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, you may be suffering from depression:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, or pessimism
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some people experience only a few symptoms while others may experience many. Several persistent symptoms in addition to low mood are required for a diagnosis of major depression, but people with only a few – but distressing – symptoms may benefit from treatment of their “subsyndromal” depression.

The severity and frequency of symptoms and how long they last will vary depending on the individual and his or her particular illness. Symptoms may also vary depending on the stage of the illness.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/major-depression-among-adults.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> <https://static.propublica.org/projects/d4d/20160317-matching-industry-payments.pdf?22>

<sup>6</sup>Turner EH et al. 2007. Selective publication of antidepressant trials and its influence on apparent efficacy. New England Journal of Medicine. 358: 252-260.

<sup>7</sup> (Front Psychology, 2011; 2: 159; doi: 10.3389/ fpsyg.2011.00159).

<sup>8</sup> Arkowitz H, Lilienfeld SO. ‘Is Depression Just Bad Chemistry?’ Scientific American Mind, 1 March 2014

<sup>9</sup> J Nerv Ment Dis, 2006; 194: 324–9

<sup>10</sup> Br J Gen Pract, 1998; 48: 1840–4

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/features/teenage-mental-health-crisis-rates-of-depression-have-soared-in-the-past-25-years-a6894676.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20704050>



<sup>13</sup> Dialogues Clin Neurosci, 2008; 10: 409-18

<sup>14</sup> Initial severity and antidepressant benefits: a meta-analysis of data submitted to the Food and Drug Administration.

Kirsch I, Deacon BJ, Huedo-Medina TB, Scoboria A, Moore TJ, Johnson BT PLoS Med. 2008 Feb; 5(2):e45.

<sup>15</sup> Greenberg, G. (2010). Manufacturing Depression: The Secret History of a Modern Disease. Simon & Shuster: New York.

<sup>16</sup> British Medical Journal, 2005; 330: 999-1000

<sup>17</sup> BMC Medicine, 2015; 13: doi: 10.1186/s12916-015-0428-y

