

Depression: The Wake-Up Call to Change



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Depression has sometimes been labeled “The Common Cold of Mental Health”, that low point where everything is hopeless, nothing is joyful. Even the normal little things that make life pleasurable fail to satisfy. All is tedious and boring; viewed from the bottom of a black hole.

Most people feel like this from time to time, but when this feeling persists into weeks, it is referred to as “clinical depression”. Usually by this time it is hard to talk one’s self out of the depression, even when most of life is pretty good. This is particularly true if the low feelings are related to the current pain of a chronic illness or a recent loss.

What causes depression? Mainstream medicine points to an ‘over-activation of the nervous system, while recent evidence indicates the under-activation of the relaxation response’. Certainly the experience of the depressed person is the feeling of being overwhelmed, self-critical, hopeless and powerless, with no joy in sight.

There are many reasons why one becomes overwhelmed and joyless: some are environmental (outside the self), some psychological (inside the mind). Environmental factors include both present and past experiences. Present ones include: current difficult relationships at home or at work, disturbing living conditions, recent loss, or debilitating illness. Past situations include: childhood trauma, unresolved conflicts, and ungrieved losses. Often the Christmas Season brings up these old griefs. The Joyful Season can be so depressing! Related psychological factors include: belief systems developed over a lifetime; attitudes from which develop thought patterns and feelings, many of which one is completely unaware. However they can result in behaviours that do not always serve one well and can make current situations worse.

Negative experiences and negative ways of seeing and handling things add up in the body and mind creating stress, a sense of being overwhelmed and miserable. Every organism, after all, has a breaking point. Depression, therefore, can be a Good Thing! It is a wake-up call to Change. And, fortunately there is a lot to be done about it.

Consider gaining understanding of the unique factors contributing to one’s own particular emotional state. Losses need to be grieved, unfinished business addressed, negative attitudes, thoughts and behaviours changed. Learning to see the (often inadvertent) part one has played in contributing to one’s depression, and learning to overcome it, is a valuable gift a person can give one’s self.

Consider:

- Walking for half an hour every day
- Staying ‘here and now’ (staying out of the past (anger, regret) and the future (worry, anxiety))
- Counting your blessings
- Saying ‘yes’ sometimes and ‘no’ sometimes
- Joining a yoga class
- Counselling to clear up ‘old baggage’
- Adopting a compassionate and curious attitude toward yourself



Some helpful books: *‘The Power of Now’* Eckhart Tolle
‘Change your Brain, Change your Life’ Daniel Amen
‘Taming your Gremlin’ Rick Carson
‘Yoga for Depression’ Amy Weintraub

