

8 Steps to Reduce Depression

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According to recent studies, depression affects over 8% of adults and 17% of adolescents in the U.S. Depression takes many forms, including major depressive episodes, bipolar disorder, postpartum depression, PTSD, general anxiety disorder, and Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). Depression is also the top disability and reason for missed work days.

Common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad, hopeless, or irritable
- Anxiety or agitation
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Difficulty thinking or focusing
- Unexplained symptoms such as backache or headaches

THE ROOTS OF DEPRESSION

Sometimes depression is linked to an illness, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, or sheer loneliness. At other times, the cause of depression is far less clear. There is increasing evidence that numerous factors are likely involved in the development of depression. Here are some of the root causes that may be involved.

• **Leaky Gut and Dysbiosis**—

There is a clear connection between gut health and brain health. If the gut barrier is compromised, undigested bits of food, toxins, and pathogens can enter the bloodstream, creating inflammation. Over time, leaky gut and inflammation lead to poor nutrient absorption, which affects the brain. About 90% of serotonin and 50% of dopamine, both “feel good” hormones/neurotransmitters, are produced in the gut. When the intestinal lining is compromised, the brain may not get sufficient amounts of these neurotransmitters. In addition, an imbalance of microbes in the gut may contribute to depression.

• **Underlying Infections**— There are various infections linked to depression. They include Lyme disease, West Nile virus, and *C. difficile*. Chronic, low-level infections cause

systemic inflammation and may contribute to symptoms of depression.

• **Toxic Load**— The buildup of toxins in the body may contribute to depression. Certain molds can trigger inflammation and cognitive symptoms. Air pollutants may cause neuroinflammation, especially in children. Some studies link EMF exposure to several common depressive symptoms. In addition, widespread exposure to synthetic chemicals contributes to overall inflammation and damage to the gut and its microbiome.

• **Blood Sugar Imbalances**—

Dysregulated blood sugar levels and insulin resistance negatively affect mood and cognitive function. Anxiety and depression are common symptoms of high and low blood sugar levels.

• **Hormone Imbalances**— Imbalances in thyroid hormone, cortisol, insulin, and the ratio of estrogen to progesterone can all contribute to mood disturbances and symptoms of depression.

• **Chronic Stress**— Whether physical, mental, or emotional, stress can lead to depression. Chronic stress damages the gut lining, impacts the microbiome, increases inflammation, and strongly influences the development of hormonal imbalances.



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• **Lack of Sunlight/Movement** —

Lack of exposure to natural sunlight contributes to depression, especially in the case of Seasonal Affective Disorder. People who live in northern climates or places with consistently overcast weather are especially susceptible. In addition, there is a strong correlation between a sedentary lifestyle and depression for people of all ages.

STEPS TO REDUCE DEPRESSION

If you suffer from depression, there are several steps you can take to reduce and reverse your symptoms. At the same time, seek the advice of your doctor or another healthcare professional to ensure that you receive the appropriate care.

1) GET REGULAR EXERCISE.

Regular, moderate exercise is known to be as effective as medication for relieving mild to moderate depression. Exercise oxygenates the body, releases feel-good hormones like dopamine, and improves eating and sleeping patterns. Walking for 30–45 minutes at least four days a week is a great place to start.

2) TRY LIGHT THERAPY. Using a full-spectrum, 10,000 lux light daily is helpful for people with SAD.

3) INCLUDE OMEGA 3s AND KEY NUTRIENTS. Omega 3 fatty acids are essential for brain health. They also reduce inflammation in the

body. Other nutrients to consider optimizing include B6, B12, folate, vitamin D, magnesium, and the zinc-to-copper ratio. Herbs such as St. John's Wort may also help reduce depression. I strongly encourage working with a health practitioner who can help you pinpoint which nutrients you may need to supplement.

4) DITCH THE SUGAR! Sugar is a significant factor in the development of inflammation, blood sugar imbalances, and hormonal disruptions. Refined sugar consumption can contribute to depression and anxiety. One of the best things you can do for yourself is to wean off all refined sugars, flour, and alcohol. Doing so can lead to an improvement in symptoms.

5) EAT A WHOLE-FOOD DIET.

A diet rich in whole foods such as vegetables, low-glycemic-load fruits, and clean protein will reduce inflammation and provide a variety of nutrients needed for optimal brain function and balanced moods.

6) FOCUS ON GRATITUDE.

Writing down three things you are grateful for every day can begin to shift your negative thought patterns. Another strategy is to intentionally refocus in a positive direction whenever you notice a negative thought pattern arising.

7) LISTEN TO MUSIC. Music has a powerful impact on your mood. Listening to music that has a relaxing or uplifting quality is a simple yet effective tool.

8) START A MEDITATION OR BREATHWORK PRACTICE. Both meditation and breathwork help to improve moods. They are excellent tools for processing and releasing emotions that may be contributing to depression. ■

If you are suffering from depression, don't wait to seek help! At Sage Wellness Center, we can help you discover what factors are at the root of your symptoms and support you in making changes to restore balance to both body and mind!

SUICIDE PREVENTION

CRISIS TEXT LINE |

Text MT to 741-741
A free, 24/7 text line for people in crisis.

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

IN MT, JUST DIAL 988

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

If you are in crisis and want help, call the Montana **Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 24/7: NOW DIAL 988**

Much more than just a switch to an easier-to-remember number, it represents a holistic revision of the State's suicide prevention and mental-health crisis-management system.

Please feel free to download any of the programs and resources on our website:

**Dphhs.mt.gov/
SuicidePrevention/
suicideresources**

SuicidePreventionLifeline.org

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