

MOODS

Serving People with Unipolar and Bi-polar Illness, Their Families and Friends, since 1981

May 2018

Ask the Doctor

What can I do holistically to reduce anxiety and depression?

These eight holistic actions should be part of an integrated approach to treatment with professionals.

Exercise: Exercise elevates mood and reduces symptoms of depression. Increased physical activity, such as yoga, tai chi, and qigong, improve symptoms of anxiety. And walking 30 minutes a day can reduce your risk for major chronic diseases. Exercise works because the body is stimulated to produce serotonin and endorphins. These are chemicals in the brain that reduce depression.

Diet: Eat a healthy diet—fresh, whole foods; drink lots of water; get enough calcium; and keep trans-fats low. Take care of your gut by taking probiotics and eating foods such as yogurt and miso. Reduce beverages such as tea, soda, and fruit punch that have been sweetened.

Alcohol: Stop drinking alcohol. Depressed individuals may use alcohol to self-medicate.

Sleep: Get adequate sleep in both length and quality each night. Poor sleep affects mood because the neurotransmitters that support mood are replenished with sleep.

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The Power of Peer-Led Mental Health Support Groups

By Tory Masters

MDSG quite literally saved my life. On the surface my life seemed ideal. Successful career in television, a loving husband, a new born son and good friends. But I was in a black, terrifying depression and unbearable anxiety consumed my every waking hour. I felt hopeless and worthless. Mental illness ran in my family but stigma prevented us from ever talking about it, let alone admitting it or asking for help. So we learned to live behind the isolating mask of “being fine”. I lost two much older siblings to suicide due to the destructive power of stigma and shame.

I broke the family cycle of isolation on the day that I walked into the Mood Disorders Support Group of New York (MDSG). That was in 1992. And I am thriving today due, in major part, to the way that MDSG helped me to understand and accept that having a mental health disorder was not my fault and in no way a personal failing but a brain disease that was treatable.

What makes support groups like MDSG so invaluable to sufferers is that they are run by “peers” – individuals who “have been there themselves”. They too once resisted treatment due to shame and self-imposed exile. They too, due to peer support, final-

ly embraced recovery and wellness strategies that transformed their own lives.

Peer support groups provide an alternative to despair and feeling alone. Participants engage with people who truly understand them without judgement, and in the process the crippling ideas that these struggles are somehow their fault or due to a personal weakness are dispelled. The groups foster an environment that empowers and inspires attendees to help themselves and each other through shared experiences and recovery strategies.

They also motivate individuals to get educated and take personal responsibility for the self-care and self-advocacy needed to make sustained wellness a reality. They cultivate a sense of belonging, self-acceptance and renewed self-respect. Finally, they instill trust, hope and a belief that a meaningful recovery is a reachable goal.

I know without a doubt that my two siblings would still be with us today and living meaningful lives if they had only had access to this type of support. The silver lining is that my experience is informing and inspiring my son as well as the children of my two siblings.

Tory Masters is vice-chair of the MDSG Board of Directors.

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Thoughts and Emotions: Negative thoughts and feelings upset the body's hormone balance. Try meditation or positive thinking to increase calmness and happiness.

Stress: Identify what creates stress and learn relaxation techniques.

Social Support: Regularly contact friends and family; join a class or support group; volunteer; or have a pet.

Purpose: Have a strong sense of purpose, which helps to handle the ups and downs of life.

People say they have Bipolar I or Bipolar II. What are the differences?

Bipolar I: Mood swings cause significant difficulty in your job, school or relationships. Manic episodes can be severe and dangerous.

Bipolar II: Less severe than Bipolar I. There may be an elevated mood, irritability and some changes in functioning, however, you can generally carry on with your normal daily routine. You have hypomania—a less severe form of mania. Periods of depression usually last longer than periods of hypomania.

Cyclothymia: A mild form of bipolar disorder where hypomania and depression can be disruptive,

however, the highs and lows are not as severe as with bipolar I or II.

Rapid cycling bipolar disorder: There are rapid mood shifts, defined as having four or more mood swings within a single year. Some people, however, have mood shifts that occur much more quickly, sometimes within just hours.

What are the major risk factors for bipolar disorder?

There are five major risk factors: Blood relatives such as a parent or sibling with bipolar disorder.

Periods of high stress.

Drug or alcohol abuse.

Major life changes, such as the death of a loved one.

Being in your early 20s.

New Book

Leder, Jane Mersky. Dead Serious: Breaking the Cycle of Teen Suicide. 2d ed. Publish, 2018. 210 pp.

This book aims to assist those who have lost loved ones to suicide as well as those who are on the brink. This is a completely revised and updated edition of the author's classic work published 30 years ago. The author has been there since her brother committed suicide at age 13.

Recent Items of Note

Brain & Behavior Research Foundation: Genetic Analysis Points to Anorexia Nervosa's Psychiatric and Metabolic Roots.

Healthyplace.com: How to Fight Depression Stigma

Healthyplace.com: Bipolar Disorder and Cigarette Smoking: Why We Do It

Bipolar Network News: Treatment During Pregnancy

Healthyplace.com: Why You Need a Wide Mental Health Support Network

Healthyplace.com: Disconnection in Depression: Signs and Tips to Reconnect

Mood Disorders Support Group
New York

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All information in the newsletter is intended for general knowledge only and is not a substitute for medical advice or treatment for a specific medical condition.

Ask the Doctor Send your questions about depression and bi-polar illness to newsletter@mdsg.org Questions will be answered by a psychiatrist or psychologist as appropriate and as space permits.

Ask the Doctor will return with the next issue of MOODS.