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*This book is strictly informational and is not intended as a substitute for medical advice. If you have a specific health concern or are experiencing any symptoms that scare or concern you, please contact a health care professional in your area and seek immediate medical help.*

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# INTRODUCTION

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## A Short History of Depression

*The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature.*

—JOSEPH CAMPBELL

On any given day, 18 million Americans are depressed. That's almost 10 percent of the population. And that doesn't even count the 3.3 million of you who are suffering from dysthymia (chronic low mood). Despite America's amazing health care system, by 2020 depression will be the second leading cause of burden and disability not only in America but also worldwide, second only to heart disease. It's also the leading cause of disease for women among high-, middle-, and low-income countries.

### "THE BEST HEALTH CARE IN THE WORLD"?

I was speaking a bit tongue in cheek when I said "amazing health care system." I cannot tell you how many medical lectures I have been to in my almost twenty years of research, schooling, and clinical practice in which some doctor or administrator has claimed that our system in America is the "number one system in the world." I need to let you, and those speakers, in on a little fact: The World Health Organization looked closely at the efficacy of

health care systems around the world and ranked the American system with other countries. Can you guess where we were ranked? Number one or two? In the top five? Nope, nope, and nope. Actually, we came up as number thirty-seven out of 191 countries, right between Costa Rica and Slovenia. And, to get that revered position, we outspend any other country per person by more than 250 percent—so we spend the most money to keep our thirty-seventh place. Further, it seems life expectancy is actually going down. In 2005, the *New England Journal of Medicine* announced that for the first time the new generation would not likely live as long as the previous one. Yikes. Why are we spending all this money in order to be living shorter lives?

In the spirit of balance, let me also make it clear that, as a naturopathic physician (please see more about naturopathic medicine in the resources section of this book), I am not anti-medical doctor and I am not antidrug. When modern medicine is used appropriately, it can save a life—no doubt. A quick story about me: When I was five years old, I had a benign tumor on one of my upper neck vertebrae that practically eroded the bone to the point that I was near being paralyzed. If it wasn't for modern medicine (anesthesia, antibiotics, and skillful surgery), I would likely be paralyzed today. I do not know of a natural therapy that would have helped at that point. As I tell my patients in my practice in New York City: "If you get hit by a bus, don't come to my office for herbal therapy, a lifestyle change, and some caring words. Instead, get to the hospital and use all the brilliance modern medical care has to offer." But, for many long-term and chronic illnesses, modern medicine seems to be failing most of us by not addressing the underlying cause, instead using medicines that cover symptoms and do not help the body heal itself.

## WHY THIS BOOK?

So why do you need this book? Can't you just take an antidepressant and then feel fine? In the standard medical model, you might

think so, as physicians prescribe antidepressants more than any other drugs in the world. In the United States alone, a country with 281 million people, 232.7 million prescriptions were used in 2007, reported IMS Health, mostly to allay symptoms and to provide what was hoped to be a quick fix.

Unfortunately, when it comes to depression, rarely is there a quick fix. The human brain and its moods are very complicated. Some researchers now believe that to say the word *depression* is like saying the word *cancer* in the sense that it may be a group of disorders rather than a single entity. That's why some antidepressants work for some folks (about 30 percent of them) and not for others (about 70 percent of them). Some work well for a while and then stop working. Take the supposed miracle drug Prozac, for instance. Google "Prozac poop out" and you'll find over twenty thousand articles on the problem.

As most people suffering with depression have unfortunately found out, simply popping a pill is not usually a miracle treatment. In fact, despite their incredible popularity and all the marketing hype, antidepressants don't work well for far too many people, and their unpleasant side effects can be stronger than their supposed benefits.

Come with me on a short history of depression for a deeper look at this sorry state of affairs.

## YOU WERE LIED TO

Depression was first recognized and treated by Hippocrates, the father of medicine, in the 5th century BC. This disease could render its victims helpless and hopeless, and at its worst, it could even cause death. Hippocrates, in all his brilliance, treated this serious and potentially fatal condition quite successfully with sleep, diet, herbs, and water baths.

As time and science moved on and society became increasingly complex, the medicine of Hippocrates was replaced with newer theories and other ideas—electric shock, lobotomies, talking

therapy. However, depression remained an insidious and hidden disease, partially because both sufferers and family members experienced shame and a discouragingly low rate of long-term relief.

Beginning in the 1960s, miraculous drugs were developed to combat this terrible condition. And truly miraculous they appeared to be. These drugs touted a success rate of up to 90 percent for the 25 percent of the population that fell victim to this condition. In the next three decades, such medications vaulted to the top class of all drugs sold, with over \$20 billion spent annually.

Despite this rapid pharmaceutical success, most people were not getting better. In 2002, the World Health Organization declared this problem to have, surprisingly, worsened. Then in 2008, the reason for the worsening situation emerged as the medical world was rocked by a study from the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It revealed that the public had been deceived: 31 percent of Food and Drug Administration studies on these had purposely not been published. The courageous authors of this paper explained that even the studies on the effectiveness of antidepressants that were published were erroneously skewed to represent positive results, even though the actual study statistics were negative. Other studies had already shown that these drugs were causing a host of problems including sexual side effects, infertility, increased risk of weight gain and diabetes, blood pressure problems and cardiac deaths, heart defects in unborn children, and even suicide. In 2010, researchers finally decided to look at all the studies in an unbiased approach, and they published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that even though millions and millions of people were prescribed these medications, most of the people using them actually gained little or no benefit except in the most severe cases. Despite this definitive research, the medical world continues to treat depression with the same drugs. And to add to the magnitude of the problem, a recent *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* study of twenty thousand people revealed that more than a quarter of Americans who are taking antidepressants have never

been diagnosed with depression or anxiety and therefore could be exposed to side effects from these medications without any proven benefits.

Does this sound too outrageous to be true? Unfortunately, it's completely true. So what is a person suffering with depression or low mood supposed to do?

## WHAT THIS BOOK CAN OFFER YOU

In this book, I give you comprehensive yet easy-to-follow solutions that I have seen work for people like you. The best treatments for depression, it turns out, are integrative methods that combine both natural and properly used conventional methods in order to address the source of the depression while providing real and sustainable results.

*How Come They're Happy and I'm Not?* is designed to build upon what Hippocrates already knew: that natural treatments are safe and effective to deal with depressive illness. But it's not antidrug. I will discuss when pharmaceuticals are appropriate and when it's safe and beneficial to combine natural remedies with conventional care. I will also address beneficial and possible risk interactions. Then I will talk about integrated methods to help those of you on medications safely wean yourselves off and avoid depression relapse.

I will show you why pharmaceuticals, or any single natural remedy for that matter, will likely not cure your mood. Mood disorders are not caused by one factor but instead by many factors that have synergized over the years to create the way you feel now.

In this spirit, I will explain the many possible underlying causes such as inflammation, digestive problems, low nutrient levels, stress, spiritual concerns, and disease, and I will recommend specific lab tests that can further direct your attention to the particular underlying causes of your depression. Then, depending on what we find, I will recommend specifics to bring to your doctor in

order to tailor an integrative treatment plan. And of course I will recommend appropriate dietary, exercise, and other therapeutic options for self-healing. You can also check my website if you want to learn more about the research behind the recommendations.

## BREAK IT DOWN

Despite being comprehensive, this book is designed to be read by people dealing with depression. Usually that means they have pretty low energy and motivation—so it better be easy. Part I offers easy steps for finding your way to help. I will ask some basic questions to guide you to advice that will be most useful, and I will suggest the top things to do right away to experience relief. Once you are feeling better, you can read the other chapters to receive more comprehensive support.

You will learn that, in the majority of cases, depression is the body's natural response to external stressors and/or internal imbalances and that there are many choices unique to your circumstance to heal the underlying illness. There are reasons for your feelings, and there are real, natural solutions. There's hope.

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## PART I

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The Quick Solution—  
Why They Are Happy

# 1

## Owner's Manual to This Book

*Most people treat the office manual the way they treat a software manual . . . nobody ever looks at it.*

—JAMES LEVINE

If you're reading this, chances are you don't feel very happy right now. Because of that, I will keep this "owner's manual" chapter short so you get right to the information you need.

Besides not feeling very happy, there's probably another reason you are reading this book: because somewhere inside your body and mind, you genuinely believe there's more in this world for you to do and achieve, but your mood is stopping you from doing it. And you are hoping, after everything you have been through, all the books you have seen, and the advice you've read on the web, watched on TV, and heard from friends or family, that this book might actually be helpful.

There's a reason I wrote this book: because my experience with patients tells me you can use how you are feeling now to eventually move on to be the best you possible. This book is based on my experience with thousands of patients who were in the same position as you.

The last thing you need to do right now is to have to wade through a lot of confusing pages of medical facts and drug bashing, jump through hoops, and read stories of people who are now

well. Instead, you probably want simple solutions to feeling better that are easy to do and will work quickly. I know because I've helped thousands of people just like you.

Don't despair; help is on the way.

The truth is, there are many wonderful books out there about depression, all with excellent information. In fact, I list some of them in the resources section of this book because I believe when people are challenged, it's good to gather information from many perspectives as a way to learn from many different angles. These are all well-meaning books, but they are usually afflicted with one of two issues: either they are too long and include too much for readers who do not feel well to wade through, or they are missing important details.

My sincere hope and belief is that this book does not fall into either pitfall. This book is designed for people with depression and low mood to be able to first use easy steps. Then I will offer more extensive discussion, medical facts, and hoops to jump through later on, when you are ready.

One of the major issues I have seen in many of my patients with depressive illness is the inability to start and complete tasks. When you're depressed, the simplest tasks become difficult, due to either lack of motivation or physical symptoms that are just too great to traverse.

Although depression is a complex condition, this book is designed to make help as simple as possible. It offers quick and easy steps that a depressed person or a loved one can take to experience fast relief.

First read the short second chapter, which gives the basics for anyone looking to create a healthier mood. Start implementing as many of these suggestions as possible. If you do not read any other part of this book, just read chapter 2 and try your best to accomplish as many of these steps as possible. These steps will not be all accomplished in a day, I assure you. But that is just fine—the important thing is to get started.

If at all possible, I recommend that you read chapter 2 with a supportive person who can help you organize your schedule and

can check in on your progress. Pick someone with whom you feel secure. If you do not have someone like that in your life right now, that is okay too. You can do it on your own just as well.

Which parts of the book should you read after chapter 2? To figure that out, please read through the following and find the description that best fits you:

For males and females age 15 or older: Read chapters 2 through 6 first. Read chapter 7 if you are taking antidepressant medication. Read the “Gender Differences” section of chapter 8.

For seniors: Read chapter 2 first, then the “Seniors” section of chapter 8. If you are on medication, read chapter 7. Finally, you can read all the basics in chapters 3 through 6.

For anyone taking medications: Read chapters 2 and 7 first; then follow with the rest of the book starting with chapter 3.

Please note that there is a lot of information in this book. Don't worry about reading it cover to cover to start; I don't want you to feel overwhelmed. You can start slowly and skip to the sections that seem the most useful for you. You can do it in parts, a little at a time. Take it at your own pace. You can also refer to the site map located at the back of the book. It is a comprehensive list of all recommended therapies with concise information on when to use them. Feel free to refer to this framework as you traverse the book at whatever speed works for you.

Remember, you are doing a great job: the fact that you are reading this means your brain and body want to be united as one happy being living to your greatest potential. The fact that you are reading this means you want to be well, and that is the most important (and often the most difficult) step.

# 2

## The Fast Lowdown of What to Do: The Top Seven Steps to Healing Depression

*We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

—ROMANS 5:3–4

While this book is filled with over 17 years of research and clinical experience, this chapter avoids the details of all that, by distilling it down to a quick guide to what really works.

You may not be able to do all the steps I suggest here, but try your best to do what you can. Any one of these can help, and the more you do, the better you'll feel. Later in the book, I'll discuss these steps in more detail as well as offer other actions you can take to support your well-being even further.

### STEP 1: DETERMINE IF YOU SHOULD BE TAKING MEDICATION

It's not safe to discontinue medication without speaking to your doctor first. If you're taking antidepressant medication, even if you don't feel it's helping, it's best to stay on it for now and let your doctor know that you'll be trying natural medicines. You can share this book with her to help with that discussion if you'd like.

If you believe your medication is helping you, then consider the medication a blessing. Some people get so depressed that they are unable to take the natural steps to help themselves out of the depression. If this was you, and now medication is helping, then that is a good thing. Now you're in a better place to add in the other treatments you'll learn about here. We will work on safely weaning you off the medications later in the book.

If you're having side effects from the medication and you think it is making you feel worse, tell your doctor. He may want to change the dose or switch the medication you're taking. Typical side effects of depression medication include irritability, suicidal thoughts, difficulty falling asleep, excessive hunger, loss of sexual appetite, and weight gain. The younger a person is, the more likely she will experience the side effect of an urge to take her own life. If you're having suicidal feelings, go immediately to your doctor or hospital. They can help you.

If you are not on medication, please take this simple quiz to help you decide if medication is a good idea for you:

1. Does your mood stop you from taking care of yourself (for instance, you do not bathe or eat regularly)?
2. Does your mood stop you from going to work and doing the basic things you need to do to earn a living?
3. If you have children or people who depend on you for their life, does your mood stop you from taking proper care of them?
4. Have you had thoughts of suicide or the idea that you would be better off if you were not around?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then you should talk with a psychiatrist or physician now. As a naturopathic physician, I do not recommend drugs when other alternatives are available—drugs should be a last resort. But there are occasions when medications may be appropriate to help you in the short term if you are not at a place to help yourself. My recommendation is to look for a licensed naturopathic physician (see the resources section at the

end of the book for help finding one) or holistic psychiatrist who can provide medication while starting to work with the natural solutions in this book.

## STEP 2: ASK YOUR DOCTOR TO RUN CERTAIN TESTS

It's true that a blood test by itself has never cured anyone. However, the information from particular blood tests can be invaluable to truly understand what is going on in your body and brain. Changes in blood sugar, levels of certain nutrients and hormones, and digestive function can all significantly impact your mood. Having the blood tests I list below can help you make the best choices to help your mood. Make a copy of the blood test list and take it to your doctor as soon as you can.

It's helpful to fast for eight hours before these tests—which means not consuming anything by mouth except water. If you are a female of menstruating age, please tell your doctor where you are in your cycle. If possible, women who are menstruating should have their blood drawn on the first day of flow for best interpretation of estrogen and progesterone values.

This list of recommended blood tests is a valuable tool, especially when you meet with your doctor.

The results of these tests can help us determine the best nutritional supports for your needs. More about how to interpret these blood tests and make decisions focused on your individual needs can be found in chapter 4. Please visit my website for a downloadable detailed blood test list you can bring to your doctor today ([www.drpeterbongiorno.com/happybloodtests](http://www.drpeterbongiorno.com/happybloodtests)).

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### RECOMMENDED BLOOD TESTS

#### Fasting blood sugar and serum insulin

Chemistry panel

Lipid panel

Homocysteine  
C-reactive protein  
Complete blood count and iron panel  
Thyroid Panel  
Parathyroid  
DHEA and DHEA-S  
Testosterone  
Estrogen and progesterone (if female)  
Celiac panel  
Serum carnitine  
Serum folic acid and B12  
MTHFR Gene Variant  
Serum 25 (OH) vitamin D  
Serum mercury  
ABO Blood Type and Rh

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### STEP 3: START TAKING THESE SUPPLEMENTS IMMEDIATELY

Vitamins, minerals, and healthy oils are the molecules our bodies use to create reactions that help us make energy, create hormones, and balance immune function, not to mention aiding in a host of other necessary factors for best health. Getting a full range of these is a good start to moving your body and brain in the right direction.

#### A Potent Multiple Vitamin-Mineral Formula

Neurotransmitters are chemicals that help your body's cells communicate effectively with your brain's nerve cells. When these communicate well, your mood is at its best. Vitamins are molecules that help your body make the neurotransmitters it needs. In particular, B vitamins and magnesium are essential to the process of making neurotransmitters. The better quality vitamins are usually capsules containing powder (as opposed to hard tablets), and

high-quality vitamins are usually dosed at four to six capsules a day. Follow the dosage on the bottle and take with food.

## Fish Oil

Studies have shown that when people have a daily dose of at least 1,000 mg of eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), from fish oil, it helps them maintain a positive mood as well as good overall health. The best fish oil available is the triglyceride form (you can find this written on the label). Because fats and oils can carry many environmental toxins, it's important to make sure fish oil is molecularly distilled (it should also say this on the label) and comes from a reputable company. I do not recommend buying fish oil from a large chain store. Always check the expiration date.

Fish oil can be taken as a gel cap or a liquid. Liquid fish oil should be kept in the refrigerator after opening. If you have stomach trouble—and many patients with low mood do—or you find the fish oil makes you burp uncomfortably or gives you reflux, look for an enteric-coated version, which does not cause this discomfort. People taking anticoagulant medications (sometimes referred to as blood thinners) should check with their doctor before taking fish oil. If you're allergic to fish or vegan, you may want to try a vegetable-based essential fatty acid like algae oil, flax oil, or combined omega-3 oils including primrose or sesame. Vegetable oils are typically not as potent, but they're better than not taking any healthy oils.

## Vitamin D

Known as the happy vitamin, vitamin D acts like a hormone in the body and has important effects on mood. The list of blood tests I suggested in step 2 includes one for 25(OH) vitamin D level, which is a specific form of vitamin D in the body. It's best to check your D level first if you can and then to decide on the optimal dose of vitamin D. If you cannot check your vitamin D levels anytime soon and want to start feeling better, simply take 4,000 IU a day of

the form vitamin D<sub>3</sub>. If your levels are low, it should help give them a boost. Take vitamin D<sub>3</sub> with food for best absorption.

We will talk more about all these supplements as well as other nutrients in chapter 5.

## STEP 4: MOVE YOUR BODY

Exercise is a powerful antidepressant. The problem is that when you don't feel good, it's hard to motivate yourself to get out there. For now, do the best you can to exercise for twenty-five minutes every day, and we'll talk more about motivation in chapter 6.

The best form of exercise includes being outdoors with sunlight and trees, which can also boost mood. Jogging, walking, and tai qi are all wonderful. If you have physical limitations, you can try swimming or other gentle movement. A few of my patients who can't walk or move their legs use a tabletop pedal exerciser to move their upper body.

We will discuss exercise further in chapter 3. For now, try your best to do something every day. Anything you can do will be very helpful.

## STEP 5: ADD THESE FOODS TO YOUR DIET

Certain foods have powerful mood-enhancing properties. If you are not already eating these "happy foods," try adding them to your daily diet:

- **Water:** It is necessary to get proper amino acids into the brain. Drink sixty ounces a day, with one big glass first thing in the day.
- **Raw nuts and seeds:** Eat a total of one cup of these throughout the day. Good choices are almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds. Try not to eat roasted nuts.
- **Fish:** Eat fish three times a week. Wild salmon or rainbow trout are great choices. Canned sardines or anchovies are good if you cannot find fresh fish or do not have the urge to cook it.

- Green vegetables: Eat one every day. A cup of broccoli or spinach is a great choice. If you do not cook, eat two ribs of celery.
- Fruit: Eat one fruit every day.

There are many other healthy foods that are excellent for the brain and your mood. These will be discussed further in chapter 3.

## STEP 6: GET THE RIGHT AMOUNT OF SLEEP

Sleep has a profound impact on mood. You should sleep seven to eight hours per night. If you are not sleeping enough, do your best to go to bed earlier in the evening, preferably before midnight. If you are sleeping too much, try your best to create a schedule with a time to go to bed and then set an alarm with gentle, happy music to get you up in the morning. An ideal sleep schedule would be going to bed by ten or eleven p.m. and waking up by six or seven a.m. If you have a hard time falling asleep, try to keep your room dark at night and avoid the TV, computer, or texting at least a half hour before bed.

Sleeping too much or too little can be challenging when you are depressed. More about sleep is in chapter 3.

## STEP 7: ADD THESE SUPPLEMENTS IF YOU ARE TAKING MEDICATION

Certain nutritional supplements have been shown in clinical research to be helpful while you are taking antidepressant medications. In many cases, taking these supplements helped people when the medication alone was not effective. The following short list can be easily and safely added to your regimen:

- Folic acid: 15 mg per day. This B-related vitamin has been shown to help people who didn't respond with just medication. The most effective form of folic acid is L-methyl tetrahydrofolate and is superior to the more common folic acid form.
- B<sub>12</sub>: 1 mg per day (or the bottle might say 1,000 mcg, which is an equal dose). Studies have shown that higher blood levels of

this vitamin help people respond to medication better. Methylcobalamin is the best form of B<sub>12</sub>.

- Zinc: 25 mg per day. Zinc levels are often low in people with depression, and taking zinc has been shown to help raise mood in people who are already using medication.

All the above nutrients can be taken with food.

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### YOUR SEVEN-STEP CHECKLIST:

1. Check whether you need to take a medication—if yes, visit a physician.
2. Ask your doctor to run blood tests.
3. Take a potent multiple vitamin (full dose), fish oil (1,000 mg of EPA), and vitamin D (2,000 IU).
4. Exercise for twenty-five minutes every day.
5. Foods to add: water (60 ounces daily), raw nuts and seeds (1 cup daily), fish (3 times a week), green vegetable (1 every day), fruit (1 every day).
6. Get to bed by ten or eleven every night.
7. If you take medication, add folic acid (15 mg), B<sub>12</sub> (1 mg), and zinc (25 mg) every day.

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## HAVE HOPE

I have seen the preceding seven simple steps help many patients like you feel much better in a matter of weeks. My hope is that these will help you feel better soon, and that you will read the rest of this book to learn more about your particular body and how to keep yourself even happier and healthier in the long term. You deserve to feel good and to enjoy life—and you can!