

## **COMPLIMENTARY THERAPIES FOR MOOD DISORDERS**

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Last month I attended an event billed as "Mood Disorders Education Day" at Stanford University, and looked forward to learning about their latest research as well as new treatment options for depression and bipolar disorder. Boy, was I disappointed!

Speaker after speaker talked about the pros and cons of one medication vs. another, but no one spoke of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (or its variants DBT, ACT and MBCT) nor was there any mention of exercise, nutrition, acupuncture, or mind-body practices such as yoga and meditation. Yet all of these are established, proven therapies for treating depression and bipolar, as well as anxiety disorders.

Of course, these were psychiatrists speaking, physicians who are trained in the Western medical model of disease, which is heavily based on pharmaceutical and surgical interventions. In fact, they acknowledged repeatedly that their research funding comes from large pharmaceutical companies. I was reminded of the old adage, "If the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."

I'm not saying that medications are bad - in fact, many of my patients have benefitted significantly from medication, and frankly, some would not have survived their illness without it. But medication is rarely a complete solution, even when it works; it doesn't seem to work for everyone; and it often has significant risks or side effects.

Complimentary therapies, on the other hand, typically have few risks or side effects, often cost less, and can provide tangible benefits fairly quickly. These include cognitive therapy, which is based on the premise that we can change how we feel by changing how we think; alternative or Eastern medicine-based approaches such as acupuncture and acupressure, which act on the autonomous nervous system; nutrition-based approaches which include dietary changes, vitamin and amino acid supplementation; participation in support groups; and mind-body practices like yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, and sitting meditation.

In cases of mild to moderate depression, a combination of cognitive therapy, exercise, and dietary changes have been found to be sufficient to improve mood and mental function. Even with more severe depression or bipolar disorder, it's important to address nutrition and physical activity in formulating an effective treatment plan. For example, the addition of Omega-3 essential fatty acids, i.e. fish oil, to the diet relieved both depression and bipolar depression in many clinical studies. Reducing or eliminating caffeine and sugar, as well as common food allergens like wheat, corn and dairy, can also make a dramatic difference in mood, energy and mental clarity. Regular practice of yoga, or simply walking briskly for at least 30 minutes a day, releases endorphins and leads to long-lasting changes in the brain chemistry, which relieve stress and contribute to an overall sense of well-being.

If you're interested in complimentary therapies, but don't know where to start, contact me:

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