

Battle the Blues

Four drug-free ways to beat depression

Economic insanity, escalating job cuts, high divorce rates...it's no wonder 6 million men were diagnosed with depression last year. To make matters worse, a recent study of the top mood-disorder drugs found that the newest generation of antidepressants (including Paxil, Prozac, and Zoloft) is no more effective than a placebo in improving mild to moderate depression. The efficacy of most depression drugs is highly overstated when compared with placebos, except in cases of very severe depression, concluded study author Irving

Kirsch, PhD, a professor at the University of Hull, in England. This doesn't mean antidepressants don't work at all; it just means they don't work nearly as well as doctors thought for the garden-variety, episodic blues that affect most men. "Medical practitioners are often too quick to prescribe these drugs in response to the normal negative events in people's lives," says Blair T. Johnson, PhD, a study coauthor from the University of Connecticut. Thankfully, there are options beyond the prescription pad. Here's a guide to the most reasonable out-of-the-Rx-box options for battling the blues. **CURTIS PESMEN**

Sweat Away Stress

It has long been known that the mind can influence parts of the body, so what about the reverse? Absolutely, say researchers, based in part on the knowledge that regular, guided meditation and yoga sessions can lower systolic blood pressure by five points (and diastolic by 2.5). P. Murali Doraiswamy, MD, chief of biological psychiatry at Duke University Medical Center, was part of a team that conducted several studies comparing aerobic exercise (walking, cycling, or using an elliptical trainer for 30 minutes three days a week) with the antidepressant Zoloft. The studies found exercising "to be equally effective for treating mild to moderate depression." In addition, the researchers found that antidepressants and exercise both boost brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a key brain-growth factor.

Beat the Blues With a Salad

Adult "happy meal"? Perhaps. The "mood food" salad is made from ingredients that contain proven brain-friendly phytonutrients: parsnips, camu camu fruit, lettuce, endive, and bok choy. Dress this salad with the herb that beat Prozac in a recent double-blind study: saffron. "Make a homemade dressing with walnut oil, saffron, and turmeric," says ethnobotanist James A. Duke, PhD, author of *The Green Pharmacy Guide of Healing Foods*. "All three are powerful mood boosters."

Talk Your Way Out of It

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a kind of talk therapy in which distorted, negative thinking is logged, identified, and "defeated," helping those dark and depressed moods to lift and vanish over time. Around since the 1960s, CBT has recently gained favor after studies proved it can be as effective as drug therapy. Computerized cognitive behavioral therapy (a new version of

CBT) is powered by computers and artificial intelligence; patients answer a list of questions to help rewire their depressive thinking. It's not magic, but it no doubt has therapists wondering anew, *Who's in charge now?*

See the Light

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is now 20 years old, but the reasons the behavior training works are still not fully understood. During the treatment, a therapist may use wagging fingers

and eye-tracking exercises (such as watching a blazing back-and-forth tennis volley) during talk therapy. An increase of trained therapists has been making EMDR more widely available outside of hospitals and research centers, say experts, and the therapy is used to treat soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and depression tied to military service. It is also helpful in treating a wide range of other problems, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and phobias.



KIND OF BLUE?
Try the herb that works better than Prozac.