

SHAKING THE BLUES

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.

Dr. Aieta,
I have been suffering with recurrent depression for the past 10 years and find that the medications really don't seem to help long term, and I often relapse.
J.B.

An interesting study was done in 2000 that looked at comparing exercise as a treatment modality versus antidepressant drugs in treating major depression. The study consisted of three groups: one treated with exercise, one treated with exercise and Zoloft (a popular antidepressant) and one treated with Zoloft alone. After four months of treatment, depression significantly improved in all three groups.

However, relapse of depression occurred in 38 percent of those treated with just Zoloft and in 31 percent of those treated with Zoloft and exercise. Those in the exercise-only group had only an 8 percent recurrence rate.

That's a pretty significant difference.

Exercise has been shown to naturally raise serotonin, which is found to be low in patients with depression.

This exercise-induced elevation of serotonin levels can help many who suffer from depression. I have seen excellent

results in my patients who begin an exercise program in terms of their emotional wellbeing.

Exercise is definitely less expensive and is a lot less toxic than conventional antidepressant meds. I have also found that changing a person's diet can help dramatically with mood. The neurotransmitter serotonin is actually derived from the amino acid tryptophan, which comes from protein.

If a person is not eating adequate amounts of protein, they may be deficient in this raw material needed to make adequate amounts of serotonin. Foods that are high in tryptophan are beef, chicken, dairy products, eggs, nuts, pork, pumpkin seeds and turkey.

In some patients I will actually supplement with the activated form of tryptophan called 5-hydroxy-tryptophan (5-htp). I have had great success using this supplement along with diet and exercise in the treatment of depression.

I have also found that patients who consume high amounts of the artificial sweetener aspartame can be more prone to depression. Thus, I encourage all of my patients to never use this product.

I also encourage patients, especially



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ones who are prone to depression, to stay away from artificial food coloring. These chemicals, which are found in many different foods, have been shown to deplete the body of the vitamin B6, which is essential for serotonin production.

Depression can be a serious medical condition, and people on antidepressants should not just stop taking them without medical supervision.

I encourage patients to start with diet and exercise first, and to work with the doctor that prescribed the antidepressant to help wean them off it as they start to see improvement.

Dr. Aieta is a board-certified and licensed naturopathic physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed, e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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