

## Depression: The Way Out

**From Misery to Mastery.** Abraham was no stranger to depression. His melancholy tendencies combined with an impoverished childhood, failed businesses, and unfulfilled love seemed to point only to defeat. At one time he expressed, “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would be not one cheerful face on the earth.”

Winston came from a privileged home with every material benefit. However, his life was riddled with illness, accidents, poor grades, and lack of love. His indifferent father prophesied that W.C. would ultimately “degenerate into a shabby, unhappy, and futile existence.” In his own words, Winston battled the “demon of depression” for many years, and at times it seemed his father’s dire prediction would prevail.

Happily, depression does not have to be the end of any life story. Abraham, whose full name was Abraham Lincoln, overcame his depression and went on to become one of the most revered presidents in the history of the United States.

Winston’s battle with depression could have been the last chapter in one sad, obscure life. But Winston Churchill rose above circumstances, and as the prime minister of England during World War II, mastered his own internal challenges. Against formidable opposition, almost constant ridicule, and great odds he rallied the British troops to defeat the encroachments of the Third Reich in Europe. His famous motto became “Never, never, never, never—in nothing great or small, large or petty—never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.”<sup>1</sup>

These noble examples tell us a story—not just about singular people who overcame great odds, but about the awesome power of the human brain to retool and reshape itself according to what it learns and how it is cared for.

**The Stats Tell the Story.** If you suffer from depression, you are not alone. Clinical depression affects 20 million adults and 3 million teens in the US. Milder forms are even more widespread, affecting all age groups.<sup>2</sup>

Risk factors for depression include family history, medical or mental health conditions, unresolved guilt or anger, lack of purpose, social and environmental factors, and diet and lifestyle, to name a few.

Neal Nedley, MD, author of *Depression: the Way Out* states that it is important to find the cause or causes of your depression. Tackle as many changeable causes as possible by addressing nutrition, lifestyle, social factors, habits of thinking, and spiritual need. The importance of seeking qualified medical care for depression cannot be overstated. Adjusting and reducing medications must be supervised by a qualified health professional.

**Nutrition and Lifestyle.** John Ratey, psychiatrist and author who researches lifestyle and mental health has concluded: “Physical and mental exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate sleep will help anyone gain cognitive clarity and emotional stability.”<sup>3</sup> Alcohol, smoking, caffeine, and high fatty and sugary foods increase depression risk and symptoms.

Nutrition and exercise encourage growth factors that put the brakes on self-destructive cellular activity, release antioxidants, and provide protein building blocks for brain cells. Food is medicine—and good tasting, colorful, and powerful medicine!

Include healing fresh fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains such as brown rice and oatmeal. Give nourishment to your body and brain with omega-3 fatty acids that are found in walnuts, chia seeds, and ground flax seed. Keep your brain hydrated with 8-10 cups of water a day instead of sugary drinks. Get an adequate intake of vitamins B12 and D.

A nutritious diet improves brain chemistry, provides energy and stress-lowering compounds, and provides brain growth factors that increase brain nerve connections. This means a greater capacity for learning, meeting challenges, fighting depression, and solving problems.

**Rest.** Rest restores and helps heal the body and brain. Establish a regular “sleep routine.” A rested brain makes better choices.

**Exercise.** Exercise is a major factor in relieving and preventing depression. It causes structural changes in the brain that improve brain function even in cases of serious clinical depression. Exercise relieves anxiety, improves focused attention, creativity, problem-solving, and lowers stress. A 10-minute brisk walk can elevate mood for an hour. Daily exercise has been dubbed the most potent anti-depressant agent known to

man. New evidence has shown that exercise actually stimulates the production of new nerve cells in the brain.

**Social and Environmental.** Attitude, social networks, and a healthy lifestyle weave together for physical and mental health. Establish relationships that support healthy choices.

**Habits of Thinking and Outlook .** To a large extent we have the ability to choose how we will think about a situation. Focus on gratitude and thankfulness. Check negative thoughts. Focus on solutions rather than problems. Look at difficulties as opportunities for gaining strength to meet challenges. Two of the most important tasks in overcoming depression are focusing on thinking in a positive way and trusting God and His Word regardless of feelings.

## *The Living Word*

Everyone faces turmoil, trouble, trials, uncertainty, and sorrow. The stories in the Bible show us that in the middle of difficult times, God provides peace, comfort, and direction.

**“He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure.”** Psalm 40:2 Healing takes place with time and perseverance. Today’s choices yield tomorrow’s gifts. Persevere to press in, press on, and press through your situation. There is power for your journey, and even joy in the healing process.

**“He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.”** Psalm 40:3 Choosing God, choosing faith, choosing His plan are all decisions based on your personal choice, not feelings. You can trust his promises. Isn’t *now* the best time to discover in God’s Word the peace, comfort, and plan He has for your life?

Visit us at [LifestyleMatters.com](http://LifestyleMatters.com) or call 1-866-624-5433 for your resources to build a better brain, body, and lifestyle.

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<sup>1</sup> Nedley N. Depression, the Way Out. Nedley Publications, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/major-depression-among-adults.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> Ratey J. User’s Guide to the Brain. P. 356.