



Depression Awareness Week – 21st to 26th April 2008

In conjunction with Depression Alliance, acupuncturist, Gisela Norman will be holding open days to give free 15 minute consultations to discuss various forms of help for people suffering with depression, including their friends and family. Her added experience as a mental health nurse has given Gisela a wealth of knowledge in treating depression, stress and anxiety.

What is depression?

In its mildest form, depression can mean just being in low spirits. Depression is characterised by unexplainable sadness and melancholy, rapid weight gain or weight loss. There can be marked alterations in sleep patterns, lack of motivation and an increase in anxiety. Short-term episodes of depression can occur with hormone changes, including premenstrual syndrome, menopause, during pregnancy or shortly after the birth of a baby.

But, if the feelings are interfering with your life or if they come back, over and over again, it could be a sign that you're clinically depressed. At its most severe, major depression can be life-threatening, because it can make people suicidal or simply give up the will to live.

Why is depression a serious concern?

Depression affects 1 in 4 of us at some point in our life. The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2020 major depression will be the second biggest cause of death and disability in the world. They have found that depression can cause more damage to health compared to chronic diseases such as angina, asthma, diabetes and arthritis. Depression is more prevalent in women than men and is increasingly common among adolescents.

Depression is frequently caused by a complex series of reasons: a setback in life, such as bereavement, relationship difficulties, problems at work or school or medical conditions. Problems and setbacks can feel overwhelming and spiral out of control.

Effects of current climate on health:

The cost of treating depression has soared to more than £9bn a year in England. An important point for this current climate was a survey by the National Depression Campaign in 2007 found that financial problems were cited by 88% of people as a trigger for depression. More people rated money concerns as a likely cause than a death or illness in the family.

When under more stress our bodies are charged with adrenalin, our hearts beat faster, the fight or flight response kicks in but we cannot flee from our bills. A build-up of stress causes a build up of hormones. This can affect our immune responses, heart function and nervous system, which can lead to depression. Psychological distress from the risk of unemployment or house repossession is another side effect of recession. It is a toxic combination that research from the University of Essex has found can seriously affect mental wellbeing.

How can Chinese medicine help?

Chinese medicine has been used to successfully treat anxiety, stress, depression, and other conditions that Western medicine considers "psychological" for thousands of years.

Hundreds of studies show that acupuncture can effectively treat physical complaints such as chronic pain and arthritis, but more people are now becoming aware of the growing scientific support for acupuncture as a treatment for depression and related conditions.

Gisela Norman Acupuncturist

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Acupuncture treatment

Gisela uses acupuncture and Chinese herbal remedies in her treatment of depression. Acupuncture balances the flow of Qi - our 'vital energy', throughout your body. The Chinese medical perspective sees the flow of emotions as energy. So how we feel is very closely linked to the state of our 'vital energy'. If our energy is in balance the emotions will rise and fall smoothly. If this energy gets blocked or hampered in any way, then the emotions will get stuck too – hence depression and anxiety can follow.

Acupuncture can help resolve the underlying imbalance contributing to your depression. Stimulating acupuncture points has been shown to release endorphins and enkephalin, which can give a calming, mood-elevating effect. If you are suffering physical symptoms with your depression, such as headache, stomach ache, or backache, acupuncture can help to alleviate them. Treatment doesn't have any negative side effects and can be used safely alongside western medical treatment.

One of the major benefits of treating depression with acupuncture is that it focuses on the individual. The remedy and treatment plan is specific to the patient and how they interact with their environment. However, perhaps the most powerful evidence is the frequency with which I hear the comment in my treatment room 'I just feel better in myself'.

Self help tips:

Take plenty of exercise, turn it into a regular routine, a daily half hour brisk walk can do wonders. It moves stagnation and increases the 'feel good' hormones in the body.

Talk about how you feel, share your problems, identify what is behind your depression, find what it is you are worrying about. Then come up with plans to make changes or consult a professional therapist to help get things into perspective

Get out and join the world or a club, do not isolate yourself or avoid company

Research has shown the herb - St John's Wort is effective in lifting mood. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you are taking other kinds of medication

A few drops of lavender oil on a tissue or in the bath soothes and calms. It is important to address any sleeping problems, which causes tiredness and generates a low mood

Learn to do Qigong, Tai Qi or to meditate, and use relaxation techniques

An iron and carbohydrate rich diet helps the body produce serotonin – a feel good chemical. E.g. oats, bananas, whole wheat and take a multi-vitamin supplement

Gisela Norman is an acupuncturist with 22 years experience of Chinese medicine, a member of the British Acupuncture Council and a registered psychiatric nurse. She is a member on the Foundation for Integrated Health's project, which are producing national guidelines on integrating complementary therapies within mental health NHS services. Contact Depression Alliance on: 0845 123 23 20 or [HYPERLINK "http://www.depressionalliance.org"](http://www.depressionalliance.org) www.depressionalliance.org

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