

What other treatments are available for depression and anxiety?



FACT SHEET 14

It's not uncommon for people with depression or anxiety to try to manage the illness themselves. It's important to know that while there are other non-medical treatments available these may be either helpful or harmful. Treatments that are helpful include increasing physical exercise or getting enough sleep. Harmful strategies include drinking more alcohol and smoking marijuana.

Some non-medical treatments have undergone scientific testing and may be tried if the depression or anxiety is not severe or life-threatening. The tables below show the range of other treatments available and the evidence for their use in treating depression (Table 1) and anxiety (Table 2). Treatments in the 'Poor Evidence' box need more research to determine their helpfulness.

TABLE 1. EVIDENCE-BASE OF ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION

GOOD EVIDENCE	SOME EVIDENCE	POOR EVIDENCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St John's Wort (herb)♦ • Physical exercise • Self-help books involving Cognitive Behaviour Therapy • Light therapy (for winter or seasonal depression) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acupuncture • Light therapy (for non-seasonal depression) • Massage therapy • Negative air ionisation (for winter depression) • Relaxation therapy • SAME (S-Adenosylmethionine)* • Folate • Yoga breathing exercises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ginseng • Lemon balm • Painkillers • Vervain# • Colour therapy • Prayer • Chocolate

* SAME is an amino acid that occurs naturally in cells.

Vervain is a traditional herbal remedy for depression consisting of the aerial parts of a flowering plant. Source: Jorm AF, Christensen H, Griffiths KM, Rodgers B. 'Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for depression'. MJA 2002; 176 Suppl May 20: p. S84-96.

♦ St John's Wort is a plant (hypessricum perforatum).

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TABLE 2. EVIDENCE-BASE OF ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR ANXIETY

GOOD EVIDENCE*	SOME EVIDENCE*	POOR EVIDENCE*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical exercise Relaxation therapy Bibliotherapy♦ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acupuncture Music Autogenic training# Meditation Inositol## Alcohol avoidance Dance/movement therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bach flower remedies Berocca Ginger Gotu Kola Herbal preparations Homeopathy Lemongrass Licorice Magnesium Passionflower St. John's Wort Valerian Vitamin C 5-Hydroxytryptophan Aromatherapy Hydrotherapy Massage/touch therapy Humour Prayer Yoga Caffeine reduction Carbohydrate rich, protein-poor diet Nicotine avoidance

* The evidence for the alternative treatments in this column pertains to specific types of anxiety disorders ranging from generalised anxiety disorder to obsessive compulsive disorder.
 # Autogenic training is a self-relaxation procedure that is based on passive concentration on bodily perceptions (eg. heaviness and warmth of legs).
 ## Inositol is an isomer of glucose and it occurs in the normal human diet with around one gram per day being consumed. Source: Jorm AF, Christensen H, Griffiths KM, Parslow RA, Rodgers B, Blewitt KA. "Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for anxiety disorders". *MJA*.
 ♦ Bibliotherapy is the use of written materials or computer programs, or listening to or viewing audiotapes or videotapes, for the purpose of gaining understanding or solving problems relevant to a person's development or therapeutic needs. Source: Jorm AF, Christensen H, Griffiths KM, Parslow RA, Rodgers B, Blewitt KA. "Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for anxiety disorders". *MJA*, 2004, Vol. 181, no. 7, October 2004, S35.

MORE INFORMATION

BluePages

bluepages.anu.edu.au/whatworks.html

Visit the BluePages website for more information about alternative treatments.

Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety:

beyondblue Fact sheet 10: Changing your thinking
beyondblue Fact sheet 11: Why do I need to take antidepressant drugs?

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