



# Lifting Depression

## Herbs and Supplements for Lifting the Sad and Sagging Spirits

Depression is an unnatural or exaggerated sadness, and may also be accompanied by malaise, apathy, lack of appetite, insomnia, etc. It is natural for everyone to feel discouraged from time to time. Only when these feelings prevent us from carrying out normal activities are they cause for serious concern.

Modern medicine tends to take a chemical approach to treating depression. Drugs are used, which affect a neurotransmitter in the brain called *serotonin*. Serotonin induces sleep and is the calming antagonist to epinephrine and norepinephrine (two neurotransmitters that promote activity and energy). Serotonin also regulates pain, depression, mood and appetite.

An enzyme called monoamine oxidase (MAO) breaks down serotonin and other neurotransmitters. The class of drugs known as MAO inhibitors, block the action of this enzyme, thus preventing the breakdown of serotonin and norepinephrine, causing their levels in the brain to increase.

The use of MAO inhibitors to treat depression has largely fallen out of favor, having been replaced by another class of drugs used to block the reuptake of serotonin. They are called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and include: Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil. If a person is on anti-depressant drugs, they should never discontinue these drugs "cold turkey," as this can cause severe rebound effects. If a person on these medications wants to use a natural approach they should use natural remedies in addition to their medication and slowly wean off of the drugs, preferably under professional supervision.

Low serotonin levels trigger an increase in cravings for carbohydrates. So, people who crave sweets may be low in serotonin. The problem is that this craving is often satisfied with refined carbohydrates, i.e., sugar and white flour products, which trigger hypoglycemia, which can contribute to moodiness.

If one wants to increase the levels of serotonin naturally, there are ways to do so. Serotonin is created from the amino acid tryptophan in the presence of vitamin B3 and B6. Diet has a powerful influence on serotonin production, because the production of this hormone is directly linked to dietary tryptophan. A meal high in carbohydrates and low in protein causes an increase in tryptophan absorption by the brain and increases production of serotonin. Plants high in tryptophan include passion flower, oats, corn and chaparral.

5-HTP, found in the formula 5-HTP Power, provides tryptophan and helps to directly increase serotonin levels. This product also contains B-6, which is needed for serotonin synthesis.

Research demonstrating that St. John's wort had both MAO and SSRI properties led to its widespread use as a natural anti-

depressant herb. St. John's wort is useful for mild to moderate depression, especially depression associated with anxiety. Other herbs believed to act as MAO inhibitors include: ginkgo, passion flower, poppy and corydalis. Ginkgo helps prevent breakdown of serotonin receptor sites due to aging, making it potentially useful for depression related to aging.

Essential oils such as chamomile, cedarwood, lavender, marjoram, melissa and orange all have antidepressant qualities and may be helpful for some cases of depression. A person should smell various oils and see which oils have an "uplifting" quality for them and then smell those oils regularly.

In traditional herbal medicine toxins in the bowel and liver (black bile) were considered to be the cause of melancholia, now known as depression. Modern research is confirming that our intestinal tract has a lot to do with mood. The gut produces neurotransmitters like serotonin. So, when the intestines are congested, neurotransmitters are thrown out of balance. Leaky gut syndrome causes the liver to be bombarded with toxins, which causes feelings of irritability or depression.

The formula Chinese Mood Elevator is very effective for many forms of depression. It works on the intestines, liver and nervous system. It reduces anxiety and lifts a person's mood, reducing feelings of sadness and depression. Many people have been able to wean off of SSRIs using Mood Elevator.

There are many other herbs that can affect different types of depression. Damiana is a mood elevator and is useful for depression associated with low energy and loss of sex drive. Lemon balm is useful for depression associated with grief. The essential oils of rose and bergamot are also helpful for depression associated with grief. Depression associated with PMS or menopause, or post partum depression can be aided by black cohosh.

Depression can also be caused by low thyroid, so Thyroid Support or Thyroid Activator may help in some cases. As people age, depression can be associated with poor circulation to the brain. Ginkgo/Gotu Kola can help here, along with Mega Chel. Adaptogens and tonics like Eleuthero Root, American ginseng and Trigger Immune can help depression associated with anxiety. Lack of iron can be another source of depression. This can be aided with I-X and yellow dock.

For more specific help with depression consult an herb specialist or some of the references below.

### Selected References

*Professional Guide to Conditions, Herbs and Supplements* by Integrative Medicine  
*The One Spirit Encyclopedia of Complementary Health*, Nikki Bradford, Editor  
*PDR for Nutritional Supplements* by Physician's Desk Reference

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