

Spring and Depression

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As we wait for the spring weather to come you might be surprised to know that it is during this season that depression is actually the highest. Common sense would seem to suggest the winter when everything is grey and cold would make us more depressed but in reality it is quite the opposite. In fact, it is the sunshine and the newness of life that seems to make the emptiness we feel inside even more pronounced. There has been a lot of research in the area of depression and there are a lot of new treatments that are making a difference. One I would like to talk about today is exercise.

As the weather improves going outside to walk or ride a bike or work in the yard becomes easier. There are several reasons why exercise helps with depression. The Mayo Clinic's website offers three main mental health benefits. First of all, exercise helps to release the brain's "feel good" chemicals called neurotransmitters and endorphins. These natural chemicals are helpful in easing depression. Secondly, exercise can reduce immune system chemicals that seem to make depression worse. And finally, exercise increases body temperature that has been shown to have a calming effect.

There are some direct benefits to the mind as well. It has been reported that exercise helps you to gain confidence as you set goals and achieve them. While you are exercising you may actually be thinking of something other than your worries and this can be very helpful. When we are depressed we seem to focus only on what is upsetting us. Often exercise can involve social interaction. If you join a class or walk on the treadmill next to someone you are with others. Just being with people can be therapeutic. Depression fools your mind into thinking you need to be alone. Depressed people tend to isolate themselves and that only makes the depression worse. I think it is helpful to remember that exercise is a healthy coping strategy. Many coping strategies carry with them other problems making the depression worse. Some examples might be overeating, alcohol, Internet or TV.

Another way that physical exercise can help is in the discipline that regular exercise demands. When a person is depressed or weighed down with anxiety it is hard to get out of bed in the morning so simple tasks can feel overwhelming. But getting out and taking a walk even when you don't want to requires discipline and this can be very empowering. It can be the catalyst to change. It can move you from feeling out of control to regaining control.

Remember if your depression worsens you may need professional help. Talk to your doctor or make an appointment with a New Source counselor. You don't have to be depressed anymore.