



COMPLEMENTARY HEALTH APPROACHES FOR DEPRESSION: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, depression is a medical condition that affects about 1 in 10 adults in the United States. Depression can be treated with conventional medicine, including antidepressants and certain types of psychotherapy. Still, many people turn to complementary health approaches in addition to conventional treatment. Although complementary approaches are commonly used and readily available in the marketplace, many of these treatments have not been rigorously studied for depression. For this reason, it's important that you understand the benefits and risks of these complementary approaches to make informed decisions about your health.

Here are some things you should know about some complementary health approaches for depression:

Some studies suggest that omega-3 fatty acid supplements may provide a small improvement

along with conventional treatment, such as antidepressants, in patients with major depressive disorder (MDD) and in depressed patients without a diagnosis of MDD. However, a lot of questions remain about how, or if, omega-3 supplements work in the body to produce such an effect.

Although some studies of St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) have shown benefits similar to standard antidepressants for depression in a limited number of patients, others have not. Research has shown that St. John's wort interacts with many medications in ways that can interfere with their intended effects, making its safety risks outweigh the benefit of any use of St. John's wort.

Current scientific evidence does not support the use of other dietary supplements, including SAMe or inositol, for depression.



Some studies on mind and body practices, when used along with standard treatment for depression in adults, have had modestly promising results.

For example, there is limited evidence that music therapy may provide an improvement in mood. In addition, studies indicate that relaxation training is better than no treatment in reducing symptoms of depression, but is not as beneficial as psychological therapies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Take charge of your health—talk with your health care providers about any complementary health approaches you use. Together, you can make shared, well-informed decisions.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

If you have been experiencing some of the following signs and symptoms most of the day, nearly every day, for at least two weeks, you may be suffering from depression:

- » Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- » Feelings of hopelessness, or pessimism
- » Irritability
- » Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- » Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- » Decreased energy or fatigue
- » Moving or talking more slowly
- » Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- » Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- » Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- » Appetite and/or weight changes
- » Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- » Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

Not everyone who is depressed experiences every symptom. Some people experience only a few symptoms while others may experience many. The severity and frequency of symptoms and how long they last will vary depending on the individual and his or her particular illness. Symptoms may also vary depending on the stage of the illness.