

# Reducing Depression & Anxiety

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## Nutrition

The most important compounds for **serotonin** (your mood-boosting neurotransmitter) **production and function** are found in nuts, seeds, beans, fruits, and vegetables. These compounds, and some of their top sources, include:

**Tryptophan** (an amino acid; one of serotonin's basic building blocks) – Oats, tofu, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds, almonds, walnuts, potatoes, cauliflower

\*\* Meat also contains tryptophan, but it contains 5 other large amino acids as well, which compete with tryptophan to gain entry into the brain. Therefore, large amounts of meat in the diet can actually block tryptophan's ability to help produce serotonin. Tryptophan also needs carbohydrates to transport it into the brain, which is why relying on plant sources for this nutrient is the best way to ensure optimal absorption and effectiveness.

**Omega-3 fatty acids** – Best source is **ground flaxseed**. The ideal method is to grind it yourself (a small coffee grinder works great!) and consume it right away. But if you have leftovers, make sure to refrigerate it and use it up as quickly as you can. The recommendation for "medicinal use" is 3 tbsp per day – take mixed into water or juice, or add to cereal, smoothies, sauces, soups, etc.

Other good sources include chia seeds, walnuts, green soybeans, pecans, spinach, avocado, red bell pepper, almonds, strawberries, blueberries, bananas, and sweet potatoes.

\* While many people use fish oil tablets to get their omega-3's, today's fish supply contains traces of mercury, which unfortunately ends up being concentrated in these tablets. Mercury is a well-known brain toxin, so it's best to avoid exposure whenever possible. This is why we recommend whole, food, plant sources of omega-3s.

**Folate (folic acid, vitamin B9)** – Chickpeas, lentils, black beans, red kidney beans, navy beans, spinach, mustard greens, peanuts, asparagus, and fresh orange juice

**Vitamin B12** – Not in foods, but in bacteria. Animals ingest B12 by eating straight from the ground. We can wash our home-grown vegetables less thoroughly, but we should also take it in supplement form.

Most supplements are cyanocobalamin, which contains a cyanide molecule and is not ideal. Look for **methylcobalamin, adenosylcobalamin, or hydroxycobalamin**, as these are already in the natural forms that your body uses, without having the burden of processing and removing the cyanide.

# Hydration

Dehydration not only causes headaches, but increases irritation and moodiness by preventing proper brain cell function. A **hydrated brain** is a healthy brain! Calculate your ideal daily intake as follows:

(Your weights, in lbs) / 2 = ounces of water you should drink each day (1 glass = 8 oz)

**Ex.** 160 lbs / 2 = 80 oz of water                      80 oz / 8 oz per glass = 10 glasses of water

**Tip!** Plan ahead when you will drink each glass:

**Ex.** 3 upon rising, 3 between breakfast/lunch, 2 between lunch/dinner, and 2 in the evening

## Other Lifestyle Therapies

### Sunlight & Sleep Schedule

Getting enough bright light through the eyes is extremely important for producing **serotonin** during the day, and **melatonin** at night. Melatonin is the chemical which regulates your sleep cycle, or your "inner clock". If possible, get bright light within 10 minutes of awakening – go for a brisk walk, eat breakfast in a sunny area of the house, or consider buying a light therapy box. If you have problems with waking up too early in the morning, it's also beneficial to get sunlight for 20-30 min around 4 pm.

### Fresh Air

Fresh, outdoor air, especially near moving water or after a rain, is full of **negative ions**. Breathing in these negative ions lowers stress hormones and reduces anxiety. Allowing fresh air to flow through the bedroom also does wonders for sleep quality.

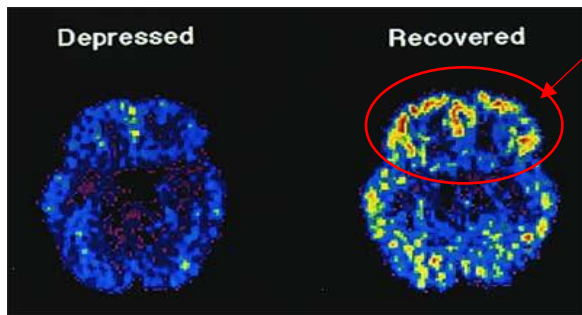
**Deep Breathing** – Studies show that when oxygen levels in the body are lower than optimum, the mood is adversely affected. Keep your oxygen levels high with frequent deep breathing exercises. Optimum oxygen levels can be reached by taking slow, deep breaths at a rate of 6 breaths per minute (5 second inhale, 5 second exhale). You should feel your abdomen expand before your chest.

### Exercise

Regular aerobic exercise (cardio) releases **endorphins** (feel-good hormones) in the brain and greatly helps to relieve stress. 16 weeks of aerobic fitness training has been shown to have an antidepressant response **equal** to the leading antidepressant drugs, but with **far less** relapse. Doing at least 30 minutes of aerobic exercise per day will significantly reduce anxiety with the FIRST workout, and will start to show significant antidepressant effects after about 7 days.

**Recommendation** – 30 minutes → 1 hour of brisk walking outdoors, first thing in the morning, will cover all 3 of these lifestyle therapies!

# Enhancing Frontal Lobe Function



Your frontal lobe is the **rational, decision-making center** of your brain, also involved with spirituality, will power, and abstract thinking. A healthy frontal lobe is necessary to achieve good mental health. It is now well established that one of the main characteristics of virtually all depressed individuals is a significant decrease in the frontal lobe's blood flow and activity.

The following factors have been studied using SPECT scans to track blood flow within the brain.

Factors which **SUPPRESS** the frontal lobe – caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, any addiction, low carbohydrate diet, entertainment screen-time (video games, entertainment TV, some forms of social media, etc.), pornography, heavily rhythmic music, and habitually going against your conscience

Factors which **ENHANCE** the frontal lobe – thought provoking reading material (especially with spiritual themes), studying/comparing Scripture, doing puzzles (word, number, or jigsaw), classical-style music (prominent melody), prayer, and prayerful meditation

**Tip!** If you don't enjoy simply sitting and listening to classical music, try playing it in the background while you do housework, cook dinner, exercise, etc.

**Tip!** Each day before bed, study the proverb in the Bible which corresponds with that day's date (ex. May. 25<sup>th</sup> – read Proverbs 25). Each morning, do the same with a Psalm. Analyzing and interpreting psalms and proverbs is a great way to exercise the frontal lobe.

## Hydrotherapy

Water can also be used externally to **improve circulation** and **increase blood flow to the brain**. This can be accomplished using stimulating contrast showers. For best results follow these steps:

1. Gradually adjust the water temperature as warm as your skin will allow for 3-5 minutes.
2. Turn the faucet to cold while vigorously rinsing your entire body for 30 seconds.
3. Turn the water back to hot for 3 minutes, then cold again for 30 seconds.
4. Repeat step 3 making sure you end with cold. This is breathtaking, but refreshing!
5. Towel-dry and dress to keep warm and comfortable.
6. Rest in a reclined position for 20 minutes. This is important because your body has been stimulated and needs to rest properly to receive full benefit from the treatment.

**(Tip!** Place a timer in a water-tight plastic bag to use while in the shower. )

# Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

**Definition:** A type of psychotherapy in which negative patterns of thought about the self and the world are challenged in order to alter unwanted behavior patterns or treat mood disorders such as depression.

**Benefits of learning and practicing CBT:** Is at least as effective as drug therapy, has no physical side-effects, makes relapse less likely, makes staying free from mental illness more likely, and changes brain chemistry.

## 1. Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative:

What we converse about greatly influences the positive or negative direction of our health. The following exercise will greatly benefit you if you dedicate yourself to succeeding:

For 2 weeks (14 consecutive days) decide to say **nothing critical or negative** about anything / anyone.

Avoid even "constructive criticism", which is often really "destructive criticism". For example, instead of saying "You're always late for work", say "Our office runs so smoothly when you're here on time." Expectations and consequences can still be enforced without critical words.

Speak to others using **positive** words and thoughts, or speak nothing at all! If you slip up, you must begin counting again until you achieve all 14 consecutive days. Don't get discouraged if you have to start over! It gets easier as you become more aware of your thoughts.

## 2. Recognize Cognitive Distortions:

These are some common distortions that can slip into many of our thought patterns and conversations, and negatively affect our perspective and mood.

1. **All-or-Nothing Thinking:** There is no "in between". It's completely one way or the other.  
Ex. "This day is completely ruined." "She is perfect."
2. **Overgeneralization:** Using limited factual evidence to hold a firm belief that actually is not true.  
Ex. "The kids always listen to you, but NEVER obey me!" "You're ALWAYS late!"
3. **Mental Filter:** Singling out one aspect of a situation to the complete exclusion of others that should be considered. Having "blinders" on.  
Ex. Saying "There is nothing good in my life", when you actually have many things going for you.
4. **Mind Reading:** Having the certainty of knowing what another person is thinking without having to ask. We can judge actions, but we cannot judge motives.  
Ex. "She's ignoring my text because she doesn't want to speak to me."
5. **Fortune Teller Error:** Knowing that if THIS happens, THAT will definitely occur.  
Ex. "I will never be able to overcome this problem." <- Watch out for self-fulfilling prophecy!  
Ex. "I must worry about this, otherwise it will happen." <- "Magical worry"

6. **Magnification/Minimization:** Majoring in minors and minoring in majors.  
Ex. "I cannot STAND the sound of that doorbell." <- Watch out for "I-Can't-Stand-It-itis"
7. **Emotional Reasoning:** Believing that your feelings don't lie.  
Ex. "I feel angry at you, proving that you have been cruel and insensitive to me."  
Ex. "I don't feel like changing anything right now, so I won't!"
8. **Labeling/Mislabeling:** Habitually defining ourselves or others with a descriptive term.  
Ex. "She didn't wash her dishes after dinner. She's so lazy."  
Ex. "I didn't pass the test again. I'm just a failure."
9. **Personalization:** Believing that all good or bad things that happen are directed towards you.  
Ex. "I can't believe they did that to me!" – In many cases, the person didn't even know you were upset by what they did, much less did it intentionally to hurt you.
10. **Disqualifying the Positive:** Acknowledging the good, appearing to be objective, but believing the good side has no value.  
Ex. You feel so bad about yourself that you think compliments directed your way are given out of pity – and thus disqualify them.

### 3. Learn Your ABC's:

Many people assume that an **A**ctivating Event leads directly to an Emotional **C**onsequence.

Ex. "What she said really upset me!", "That driver is making me SO mad!"

**A -> C Thinking** is actually called "**crooked thinking**". It supports the belief that we have little or no ability to influence our feelings and that events and situations DIRECTLY cause our emotions and behaviour.

**TRUTH:** Our **B**elief about the **A**ctivating Event is actually what causes the Emotional **C**onsequence.

**A -> B -> C Thinking** is healthy, accurate thinking. Acknowledging the importance of our own thought patterns and **B**eliefs is how we can have the power to change our Emotional **C**onsequences.

#### Example:

**A**ctivating Event – Someone is driving way over the speed limit and cuts you off.

**B**eliefs – That driver's so rude! They did that on purpose! They don't care about anyone but themselves!

**C**onsequences – Anger, frustration, and stress

We have the power to change our **C**'s. We simply need to analyze and change our **B**'s by recognizing the distortions present and reconstructing them using only TRUE facts.

Which cognitive distortions were present in the original **B**'s? Answer – Mislabeling and Mind Reading

**New B's** – That person is driving way too fast! There's a chance that they're just being rude, but there's also a chance that they have an injured passenger and are rushing to the hospital... I have no way of

knowing for sure. I'm thankful that I'm not in a situation where I feel the need to rush like that, and I'm thankful that their car did not hit mine.

**New C's** – Minor stress, followed by thankfulness

You can see that the **New C's** are much less negative than the original **C's**! By changing your beliefs to be true and accurate, this activating event now has less power to negatively effect your mood, your day, and your overall mental health.

#### 4. Practice, Practice, Practice!

Use a journal, notebook, or scrap paper, and divide the page into 4 columns as shown.

When you experience a situation that leaves you feeling **strong negative emotions**, work through this exercise. Write down the activating event, and list all of your beliefs about the event. Next, carefully analyze your beliefs, searching for cognitive distortions and writing down any that you identify. Lastly, reconstruct your original beliefs to create a new set of true and accurate beliefs about the situation.

The more often you practice this on paper, the easier it will become. Soon, you'll be able to analyze and reconstruct your thoughts in the very moment that they come to mind, and will save yourself from having to experience unnecessary or exaggerated negative emotions.

\*\* It's important to recognize that there are times when it is appropriate and healthful to feel negative emotions over a significant loss or disappointment (Ex. the death of a loved one). It may still be wise to analyze these times for cognitive distortions, however, in case any are present. If you can confirm that no distortions are present, then you will know that your emotions are appropriate and can embrace them. Writing out your thoughts is a healthy exercise in any grieving process.

Activating Event	Initial Beliefs	Cognitive Distortions	True and Accurate Beliefs

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7

"Whatever is true, whatever is honest, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things...  
And the God of peace will be with you." Philippians 4:8-9