



RESTORING BEAUTIFUL MINDS

BLUEPRINT FOR VIBRANT MENTAL HEALTH



**BOOST
YOUR MOOD
WITH FOOD**

**THE POWER OF MUSIC
FOR THE
BRAIN**

**HOW TO
DEAL WITH
STRESS**



Editorial

How's Your Beautiful Mind?

We are in a mental health crisis! In the U.S., depression among adults has increased from 8.5% before the pandemic to 32.8% presently.¹ Even more alarming is the mental health of our youth. In 2021, 4 in 10 students felt persistently sad or hopeless. More than 1 in 5 seriously considered attempting suicide and 1 in 10 attempted suicides.²

This is why we must focus on preventing, managing, or reversing mental illness.

- The Mayo Clinic reports that an anxiety disorder can lead or worsen depression and other mental health disorders, substance misuse, insomnia, digestive problems, chronic pain, and suicide.³
- Adults with depression are at increased risk for type 2 diabetes⁴ cardiovascular disease,⁵ substance use, and suicide⁶.

The good news is there is hope! We know that our Creator cares about our mental health. He created us to have productive, joyous lives, and healthy relationships (John 10:10 NKJV). He has established health laws which can promote vibrant mental health. It's amazing that scientific evidence points to these same lifestyle principles as the key to preventing mental illness and improving mental health.

What is mental health?

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It influences how we think, feel, and act; it determines how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.⁷ There are two elements to being emotionally healthy. The first is working on the prevention of mental health disorders—anxiety, depression, and others. The second is learning to develop and nurture positive emotions, a purpose in life, pursuing one's goals, having good relationships, and coping with adversity. An emotionally healthy individual will be resilient under stress, flourishing most of the time.

All of us have been created with beautiful, amazingly complex minds by a loving Creator. Some of us have had negative influences on our minds due to illness, the environment, genetics, family background, or due to wrong choices. No matter what the cause of your mental health challenge, you can get better. This magazine outlines the Creator's blueprint with scientific evidence how you can restore your mental health:

He says: "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10 NKJV). Jesus Christ was a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He loves you and wants to heal your beautiful mind if you cooperate with Him.

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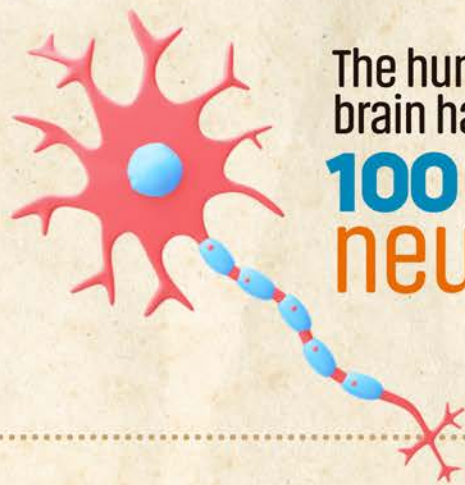
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Your Spectacular Amazing Brain



The human brain has about **100 billion neurons.**

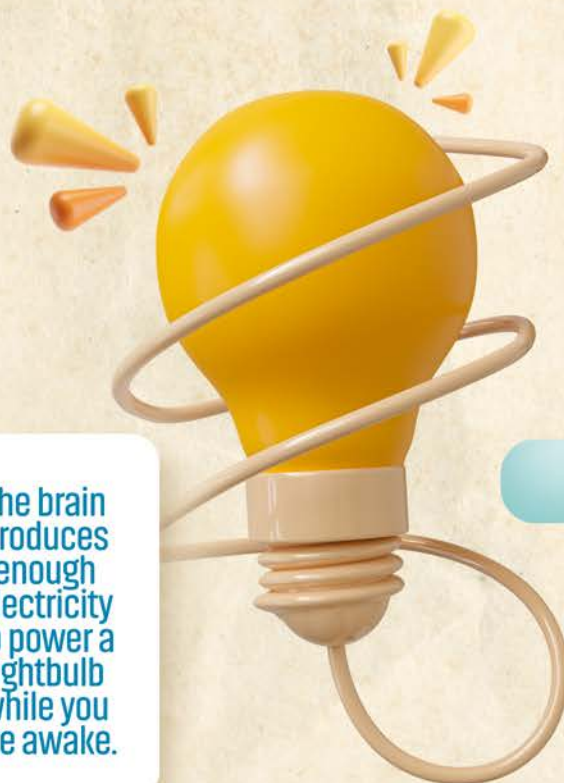
The brain can process information slowly at **1 mile per hour** **or** quickly at **260 miles per hour.**



of the brain is water.



The human brain weighs about **3 pounds.**



The brain produces enough electricity to power a lightbulb while you are awake.

Sperm whale brains weigh about

18 lbs.



The brain uses **20%** of the oxygen and blood in the body.



The brain can survive only **5-6 minutes** without oxygen.



The brain is about

60%

FAT making it the fattiest organ in the body.



Neurons develop at an alarming rate of

250,000 per minute in early pregnancy.

There are over

100,000 miles

of blood vessels in the brain when stretched out. That's enough to circle our planet 4 times.



Humans think about **6,200** thoughts per day.



I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are your works." Psalm 139:14



The Anxiety War

MORE THAN JUST A FEELING

By Aldo Cordova,
MD

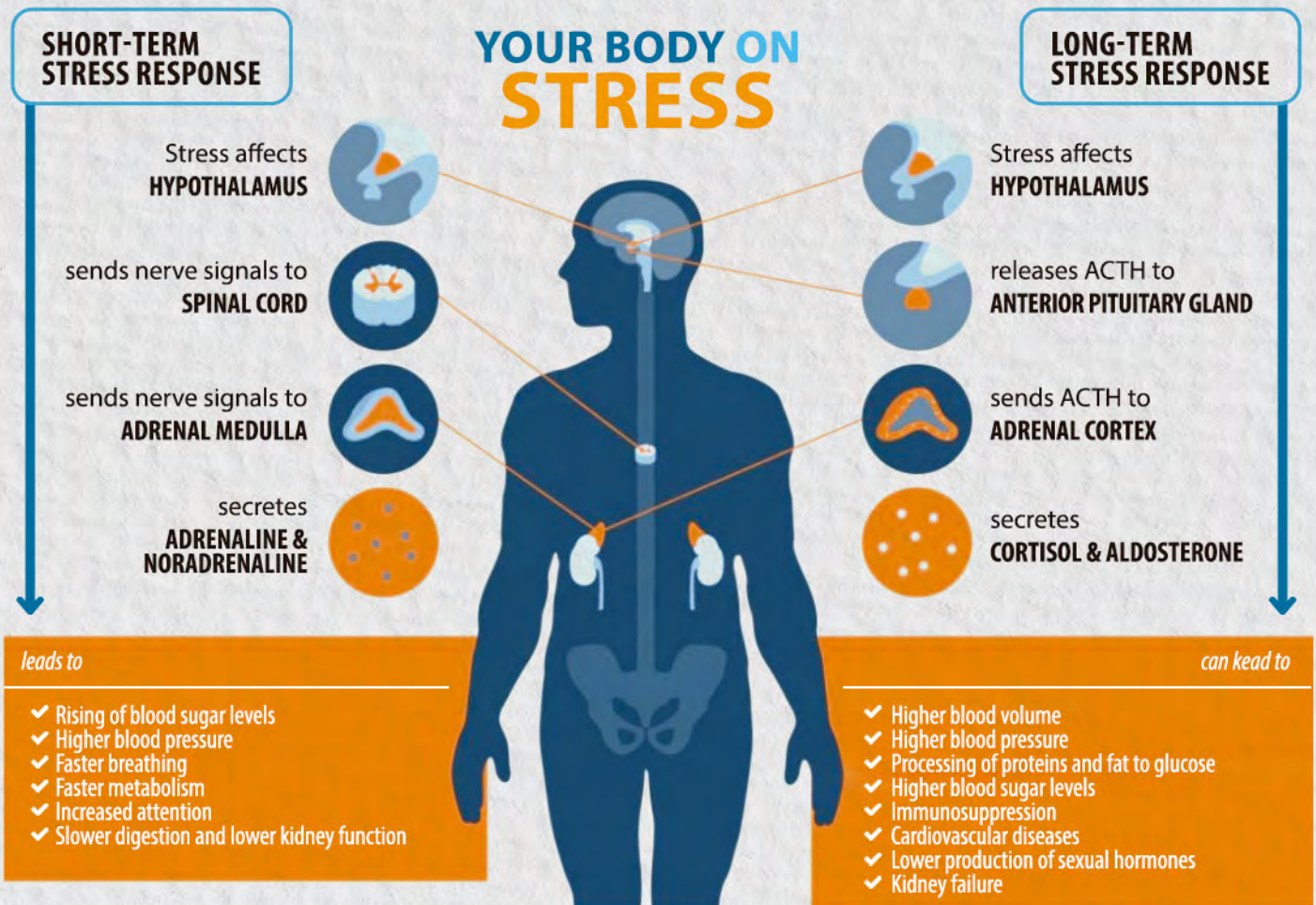
It was late at night when the ER asked me to admit a patient. Her case was discussed, and it sounded like she was doing fine, but she would not go home. Labs and imaging studies had been done and nothing worrisome had come up. When I spoke with her, she stated she was afraid because many times in the past doctors had misdiagnosed her, and what seemed small had turned into something life-threatening. On one occasion her belly pain had turned into a very severe case of appendicitis, and on a second incident, a sore throat turned out to be an aggressive thyroid tumor. Then she said: "What if this back pain turns out to be a tumor? What if something terrible happens and I die?" Stressful and painful experiences from the past were dictating her emotions now and even resulting in worse physical pain. Is she alone in this vicious cycle of anxiety, or have you ever felt such a degree of stress and worry yourself?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 31% of U.S. adults experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lifetime, and more than 40 million Americans currently suffer some form of anxiety disorder.¹ Even though we find ourselves under Christianity's umbrella, we are not excluded. Everything begins with our brain's ability to cope with stress or a specific stressor.

When we are exposed to stressful situations our normal physiological response should be to move past the issue instead of worrying. But, what if that stress lingers for an extended period? Anxiety sets in, and we are no longer in control. Depending on the severity of the stressor—which may range from a silly problem at work to serious issues such as marital problems, financial stress, death in the family, a natural disaster, or severe trauma stemming from sexual abuse which may take even years to resolve.



Figure 1



HPA Axis and Stress Response

Your Body's Response to Stress

Our body's physiology has a 3-step process to deal with stress. Our **first response** is to enter a **state of alarm**, where our body's fight or flight response kicks in.² Our brain signals our body to release stress hormones which allow us to make decisions and thrive in a state of emergency. The **second stage** is the **state of resistance** where we decide to protect ourselves, choose to flee danger, and ensure our survival.² The **third stage** is where most of us fall into trouble. Prolonged or continual exposure to a stressor leads to a **state of exhaustion** where our stress hormones are causing physical and psychological damage.² Physiological death can occur as stress lowers our immune system, causing hypertension, decreased libido, stroke, and heart disease. Chronic unresolved stress can predispose us to alcohol and drug abuse.

The normal physiology of our body is

disrupted by a hormone called cortisol which many know as the stress hormone. When we are under stress, our brain tells our adrenal glands, which sit on top of our kidneys, to release cortisol. This hormone affects our digestion, our happiness and even our immune system. When the stress goes on long enough, then the effects of this hormone can predispose us to anxiety disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, illness-anxiety disorder, anorexia, impaired memory, in addition to wreaking havoc to the rest of our body.³

Other factors and lifestyle choices can also help pave the way for anxiety and are important in identifying a successful treatment plan. Genetic predisposition plays a big role as small genetic variations in our DNA can also result in low vitamin B production, low production of neurotransmitters and hormones, and other nutrients essential for mental health.⁴ Our brain has a

way to ensure it has the perfect environment to function, and yet there can be chemical imbalances in the levels of neurotransmitters—chemical messengers that our brain uses to communicate with different parts of the body. Disruption in the brain levels of serotonin, Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), and nor-epinephrine can lead to depression and anxiety.⁴ Interestingly, our digestive system also plays a role in this. Having healthy digestive flora ensures that our hormonal and nervous systems work appropriately. So, our diet has a much deeper effect on whether we will suffer from anxiety or not.

Anxiety Disorder Subtypes

1. When worry overwhelms: *Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)*

This is the most common anxiety subtype, and it results when people feel excessively worried about things without a cause.¹ They have a persistent feeling of anxiety or dread that prevents them from living life. The New England Journal of Medicine describes some of the essential criteria for the correct diagnosis of GAD in Figure 1.5 People with GAD have no control over their worries, they are restless and can't relax; they are easily irritated and on edge, even when they are thinking about simple things such as doing household chores. The diagnostic accuracy of these disorders is crucial not only to prevent long-term effects and years of suffering, but because there are many non-drug therapies that can lead to success.

2. When fear takes over: *Panic disorder*

When people talk about their first panic attack, they will often describe their heart pounding, they are sweating excessively and are feeling like they can't breathe or think. These symptoms make them feel they are having a heart attack. More symptoms are described in Figure 3. These attacks are frequent and come on suddenly without any triggers, like a wave of fear and a sense of impending doom. The diagnosis takes place when the person has experienced at least two panic attacks and is preoccupied with a future attack or is actively trying to prevent one, experiencing anxiety in between episodes.¹ There is strong evidence that this disorder along with phobias runs in families. If it is not treated there is a high risk of suicide.

CRITERIA FOR THE DIAGNOSIS OF GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER.*

Excessive anxiety and worry about various events have occurred more days than not for at least 6 months.

The Person finds it difficult to control worry.

The anxiety and worry are associated with at least three of the following six symptoms (only one symptom is required in children): restlessness or a feeling of being keyed up or "on edge", being easily fatigued, having difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, and sleep disturbance.

The anxiety, worry, or associated physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in important areas of functioning.

The disturbance is not due to the physiological effects of a substance or medical condition.

The disturbance is not better accounted for by another mental disorder.

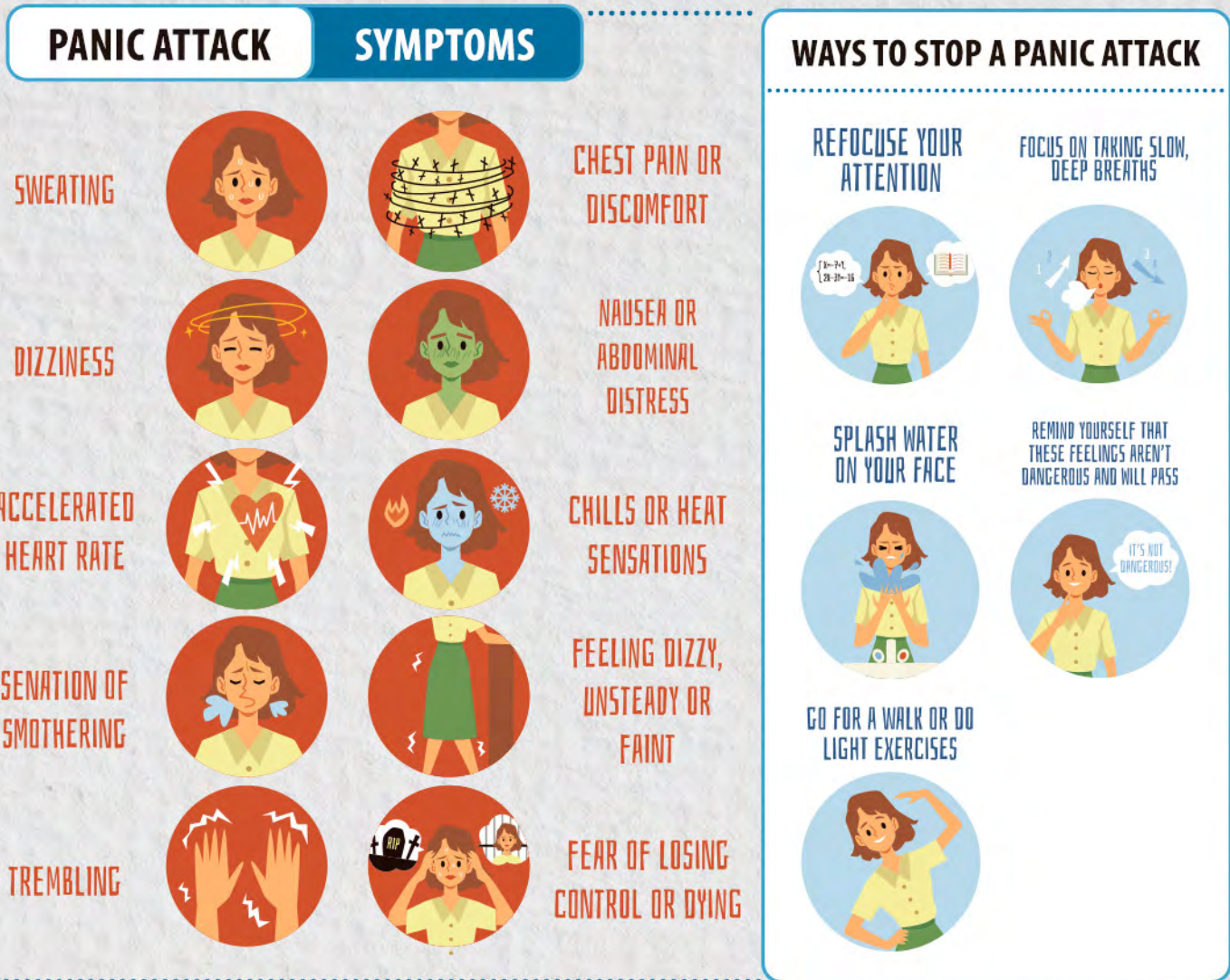
3. *Post-traumatic stress disorder – (PTSD)*

PTSD happens when we go through a terrifying event that keeps coming back as scary memories, causing us to be fearful and suppress our normal emotions.¹ These episodes are triggered by everyday life events and the person tries to avoid triggers. The terrifying events of PTSD were first seen in war veterans but now include people who experience sexual abuse, who are subject to violent crimes, natural disasters, and even serious car accidents. People with PTSD can experience nightmares, sleeping difficulties, feelings of helplessness, and daytime fears. They may have difficulty in forming relationships and trusting others. It's important to note that those with strong social support are less likely to develop PTSD even after a severely traumatic event.

4. *Phobias and social anxiety disorder*

A phobia is defined as an intense fear of a specific object or situation.¹ I suffer from **acrophobia** which is also known as fear of heights. Another common type is **agoraphobia** which is defined as the fear of en-

Figure 2



tering an open or crowded space, leaving one’s home, or being somewhere where escape is difficult. Social phobia now known as **social anxiety disorder** results from irrational fear or anxiety during a social event or one that involves performing (giving a speech, singing a solo). Worry and anxiety come from thoughts of being criticized, resulting in embarrassment.

5. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD involves obsessions and compulsions. For example, a germaphobe is obsessed with the fear of germs and is compelled to excessively wash their hands. These compulsions can take up to an hour day and interfere with daily activities.¹

C. TREATMENT OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

The scientific premise for the treatment of anxiety is that the neurotransmitters **GABA and serotonin** usually inhibit lessen the chemical pathways that are involved in stress and anxiety. Therefore, current treatments are targeted to increase brain levels of these two substances. Most anti-depressants called Selective-serotonin reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), such as Paxil, increase levels of serotonin but have side effects such as weight gain, anxiety, aggression, dizziness, and insomnia. Most people will also take medications such as Valium, Xanax, Klonopin, and Ativan which are a class of drugs called benzodiazepines. They help to increase levels of GABA in the brain and thus reduce anxiety. Yet these medications are just as addictive as opioids and can result in confusion, slower breathing, and overdose. But here are some natural methods for overcoming anxiety:

1. Nutrition and supplements

Did you know some foods can increase levels of GABA and serotonin? See Figure 3 for a list of GABA-rich foods and herbs. The starred foods are highest in GABA. Notice these are all plant foods and have been discussed in detail in the Boost Your Mood with Food article page 24. Consuming a plant-based diet can help prevent anxiety. You'll be improving your overall health and your body's relaxation mechanisms at the same time!

Figure 3

Foods High in Glutamic Acid (GABA) ⁶	
Spinach*	Soybeans
Potato*	Cauliflower
Sweet potato*	Tomatoes
Mushrooms, shiitake*	Brocoli
Chestnuts*	Tempeh
Soy yogurt*	Cauliflower
Black raspberry juice*	Brussel Sprouts
Sprouted grains	Buckwheat
Adzuki beans	Rice, brwn, black
Sprouted beans	Barley
Kimchi	Cabbage
Oats	Wheat
Herbs	Herbs
St John's Wort	Valerian
Passionflower	Mistletoe
Wild celery	Poke root

Foods Rich in Glutamic Acid
*Foods highest in GABA

Ashwagandha has been recently recognized in the U.S. as an herb for the treatment of anxiety and stress. It has antioxidant properties, and it helps stimulate the immune system. Clinical studies show that daily use of this herb (300-500 mg) significantly decreased anxiety, even better than therapy alone.³

L-theanine is another supplement that can increase GABA levels. Taking 200 mg twice or three times daily will help to increase GABA levels. Other supplements that contain licorice root, valerian and St.

John's wort can help as well.³ Proper supplementation of B vitamins and Vitamin C is also, essential to help reduce anxiety.

2. Exercise! Exercise! Exercise!

Exercise is nature's best anti-anxiety remedy. It fires up the endorphins, clears the mind, and helps us sleep soundly. Research has shown that individuals who exercise vigorously and regularly are 25% less likely to develop an anxiety disorder within five years. If you have anxiety, it is best to exercise for one hour daily 6-7 days each week.

3. Deep breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing can help reduce anxiety levels and aid in coping with stressful situations.⁷ First, lie in a comfortable place. Place one hand on your chest and one on the abdomen. Then, inhale through the nose for 4 seconds and feel your abdomen expand. Hold your breath for 2 seconds. Finally, exhale very slowly and steadily for 6 seconds. Do this exercise several times morning and evening.

4. Neutral Tub Bath

This hydrotherapy treatment relaxes the body while sedating the nervous system. Keep the room warm and maintain the water temperature between 94-97 degrees F. The bath should last between 15-60 minutes. If needed, place an air pillow under the head for comfort.

Contrast showers, contrast baths, and infrared saunas have been known to increase natural anti-anxiety chemicals in our bodies and lower levels of cortisol, reducing stress and anxiety.⁷

5. Share your anxiety with Someone you can trust

The inspired word of God tells us: "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say,

rejoice! Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:4, 6, 7 NKJV). Knowing God's word is what equips us to battle stress and fear. Reading the Bible daily will help us trust God more and give us peace. Spending time in prayer and meditation, and talking to the Almighty God, will bring healing power to the anxious mind.

6. Avoid stimulants

A wise author once wrote: "Coffee is a hurtful indulgence. It temporarily excites the mind from [abnormal] action, but the aftereffect is exhaustion, prostration, and paralysis of the mental, moral, and physical powers.⁸ The use of coffee and black tea regularly will make us more nervous and anxious.

7. Count your blessings

Expressing gratitude has a host of mental and physical health benefits. Why? Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have rather than what they lack. Studies show that feeling grateful improves mood, sleep, and immunity. Practicing gratitude can also decrease depression and anxiety.⁹ Gratitude is related to 23% lower stress hormone cortisol in the body. Gratitude blocks toxic emotions such as depression, envy, resentment, and regret.¹⁰

Tips to increase gratitude:

- Keep a gratitude journal. Write down 5 things you are thankful for each day.
- Start your day by thinking of someone you are grateful for. Thank that person with a text, card, or phone call.

8. Cognitive behavioral therapy

Christian cognitive behavioral therapy helps you identify destructive thinking patterns that put your brain on overdrive when faced with stress.¹¹ Discover how you can change your irrational beliefs and thoughts into truthful ones. Read ***Rethink What You Think*** on page 48. A qualified Christian counselor will use biblical principles and help you apply these during stressful situations so that the brain can bounce back quickly. Some techniques may involve increasing prayer and meditation, and journaling with Bible promises.

Conclusion

The Bible tells us in Revelation 21:4 that a wonderful day is coming when there will be no more anxiety, no more worries, and no more tears. But until then we will continue to wrestle with problems, worries, and anxiety, but not on our own. We can choose to lay all our anxieties before the God of the universe. Ask Him to give you the wisdom to solve your problems, overcome your stressors, and have perfect peace. Remember that your anxiety does not define who you are, and God is yet to finish writing your story.

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Beat Depression

Paul M. Balbach, FNP NPC

Depression affects almost 1 in 10 Americans, and 1 in 5 adolescents and young adults.¹ Since Covid, depression rates have more than tripled to about 32.8%. The dilemma is that most adolescents do not speak to a healthcare professional about their symptoms or receive treatment.² Unfortunately, many people try medication after medication for their depression yet with little long-term success.

Some individuals experience temporary success until tolerance is built up and then the dose must be increased. One study states that only 44% of the patients on anti-depressants are in remission (no longer depressed).³ How can a person know if they have depression? What are the best ways to treat depression? We will give you current, life-changing, evidence-based research to answer these questions.

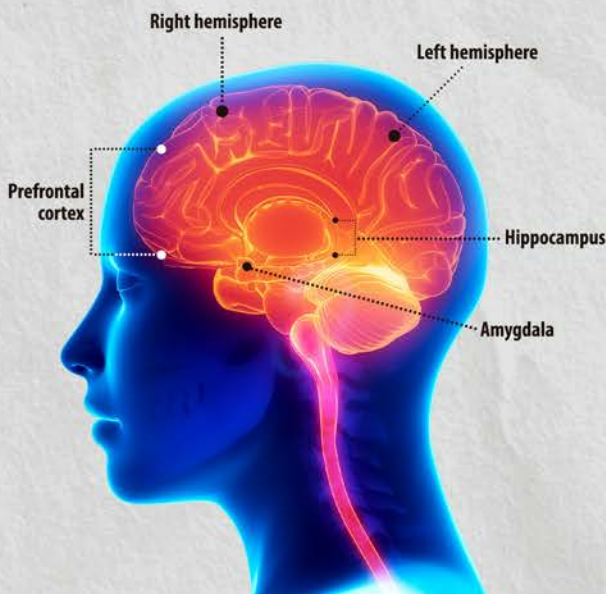
How do I know if I'm depressed?

Let's look at how to recognize depression. According to the National Institute of Mental Health⁴ (2021) a person who experiences 5 or more of the following symptoms on most days, for at least 2 weeks, is considered depressed:

- Sleep problems – too much or too little
- Changes in appetite – eating too much or too little
- Significantly low energy
- Depressed and irritable mood
- Change in interests – low motivation
- Excessive guilt
- Agitation or severe anxiety, panic attacks
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide⁴

Depression has a negative effect on many systems of our body, (See Table 1), but the good news is that depression is treatable! Your health-care provider may provide you with several treatment options such as counseling, medications, and lifestyle treatments. We will focus on 9 lifestyle strategies that have been shown to fight and beat depression. These non-medication strategies will help to change our brain's function and hormonal levels, which not only help us feel better but will also fight and beat depression!

AREAS OF THE BRAIN AFFECTED BY DEPRESSION



The regions shown here are mirrored in both hemispheres of the brain. As these structures are interlocking the illustration suggests relative position but not precise location.

Figure 3

How Depression Affects the Body

- Increased stress hormones
- Hypertension
- Osteoporosis
- Asthma
- Shrinkage of hippocampus
- Infertility
- Blood sugar control difficulties in diabetics
- Headache
- Possible increase in seizures



Amygdala: The amygdala is part of a group of structures deep in the brain that's associated with emotions such as anger, pleasure, sorrow, fear, and sexual arousal. Recalling an emotionally charged event, such as a frightening situation, activates the amygdala. When an individual is sad or depressed, the activity in the amygdala is higher and this persists even after recovery from depression.

Basal ganglia: are a group of structures deep in the center of your brain that form which important connections. Allow different regions of your brain work together. The basal ganglia is primarily responsible for movement, as well as motor learning, memorizing, thinking, and emotional processing. Some studies found shrinkage and structural changes in the basal ganglia in people with depression.

Hippocampus: The hippocampus is part of the limbic system and plays an important role in consolidating information from short-term to long-term memory. This is part of the brain that registers fear when you are chased by an aggressive dog, and the memory of such an experience may make you distrustful of dogs in the future. The hippocampus is smaller in some depressed individuals, and research suggests that ongoing exposure to stress hormones diminishes the growth of neurons in this part of the brain.

9 Habits That Fight Depression

1. Regular Physical Activity

Exercise is one of the most effective ways to prevent depression and treat depression. A moderate exercise program of 30 minutes of aerobics reduced depression as well as antidepressant medication.

When we do high-intensity exercise, our body releases endorphins, “feel-good” chemicals (serotonin, norepinephrine) that make us happy. But the greatest benefit comes from long-term, low-intensity exercise (walking) that releases brain-derived neurotrophic growth factors (BDNF). BDNF are special proteins that cause our nerve cells to grow and make new connections in the brain, which help us feel better. “Dr. Miller, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School states: “In people who are depressed, neuroscientists have noticed that the hippocampus in the brain—the region that helps regulate mood—is smaller. Exercise supports nerve cell growth in the hippocampus, improving nerve cell connections which helps relieve depression.”⁵ In

other words, exercise helps strengthen and grow the part of the brain that is “weak” and small in depressed persons. Exercise also distracts us from our worries, quiets our minds, and thus helps us overcome anxiety. In most people, it takes at least one week of daily exercise before depressive symptoms begin to improve.

Exercise also lowers our risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and diabetes, helps with weight control and improved sleep.

Is strength training good for lowering depression? An analysis of more than 1800 people and 33 studies showed that weight training benefitted mood and improved depression. The number of workouts, repetitions, or improvements in strength individuals gained didn’t matter. What was important is that they lifted weights, 2-3 times per week and completed the workouts.⁶ This is the power of strength training in addition to the benefits of aerobic exercise. Make a schedule and start incorporating exercise into your routine today.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?



- Find an activity you enjoy.
- Set reasonable goals. If you can’t exercise for 30 minutes, start with 10 min two or three times a day until you can do a full session.
- Exercise with a friend. Having an exercise partner makes exercise fun and the time passes by quickly. Walking with your dog is a great way to make exercise motivational.
- Think of exercise as a natural medicine for your body and mind.

Practical Exercise Tips:

- Have a regular aerobic exercise program: walking, jogging, swimming, and bicycling for at least 30 minutes 5 days per week.
- Ideally, depressed individuals should walk outdoors 60 minutes/day, 6–7 days per week and they will experience a drastic improvement in their mood.

**PRACTICAL
TIPS FOR A GOOD
NIGHT'S SLEEP**

- Eat an early light supper 3 hours before bedtime. Better yet, skip the evening meal.
- Keep a regular sleep/wake schedule. Set an alarm clock for arising and sleeping. A 9 o'clock bedtime produces the highest melatonin levels.
- Eliminate stimulants: caffeine, alcohol, nicotine.
- Exercise outdoors in the daylight, if possible.
- Shut off blue lights (cell phones, computers, TV) 2 hours before bedtime.
- Sleep in a cool, dark room. Open the window for fresh air.⁸
- Remove the clock from your bedroom.
- Listen to calming music.
- Write down your stressors, tasks, or things that are on your mind.
- Read the Bible and pray before bed.
- Give all your cares and anxieties to your heavenly Father for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).



2. Restful Regular Sleep

When we are continually sleep-deprived, we are at greater risk of being depressed. Research studies show that individuals who are physically fit, sleep more efficiently in comparison to those who don't exercise. Factors that interfere with a good night's sleep are being exposed to blue lights at night and staying up late before bedtime. When we are exposed to artificial light in the evenings, our eyes send a signal to the brain saying, "Wake up, wake up, it's daytime!" This stops the production of melatonin (a hormone our brain produces) and other hormones involved in sleep.⁷

Another big factor that disrupts our sleep is late evening meals, which prevent our organs and body from "shutting down" and fully resting. Late and heavy evening meals may cause acid reflux and other health problems. By eating a big breakfast, a medium lunch, and a small early dinner, we will shift most of our calories to the first half of the day. This will lead to sound sleep, prevent weight gain, and improve blood sugar control. Having adequate sun-

light during the day will help to regulate our sleep and wake cycle and produce melatonin at night.⁷

3. Plant-based Diet

Did you know what is the best diet that helps with depression and anxiety? Which foods fight can best improve your mental health? Read the article "Boost Your Mood with Food" on p. 24 and start adopting these powerful dietary habits today.

4. Deep breathing

What does breathing fresh air have to do with stress, depression, or anxiety? Deep breathing slows down the release of a major stress hormone called cortisol. Stress directly leads to cortisol release, causing fatigue, depression, high blood pressure, muscle weakness, and other symptoms. How can I lower my cortisol levels? By deep breathing, we lower our cortisol levels, increase our vitality, reduce anxiety and depression, boost immunity, and slow the aging process.

To incorporate deep breathing into your daily routine, take 5-6 deep breaths each minute. Aim for 30-45 minutes of deep breathing, divided into 3-4 sessions. You'll gain great benefits from this exercise.⁹

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR DEEP BREATHING:

- Stand erectly.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose for 5 seconds. Focus on the air going in while you expand your diaphragm.
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds, then exhale slowly for 5 seconds.
- Repeat this exercise several times, aiming for 6 breaths per minute.



5. Classical Music

A large systematic review and meta-analysis of 47 studies and 2,747 participants showed that music therapy improves stress in a moderate to a large number of persons.¹⁰

Not only does music reduce stress, but it also has a positive effect on mood and the ability to experience positive emotions.¹¹ A review of 28 studies showed that music helps to reduce depression, increase motivation, and improve self-confidence, and quality of life.¹¹ Read “The Power of Music” on page 40.



Practical Tips:

Listen to Baroque classical music for at least one hour per week.

6. Morning Sunlight

Getting morning sunlight as soon as you wake is one of the greatest things you can do to improve your mood and sleep. Sunlight increases our serotonin production in the daytime which helps treat depression and fatigue.¹² Sun exposure also helps increase our melatonin levels at night, producing a more restful and efficient sleep. Bright light therapy can also restore our circadian rhythm—the body clock.¹²

The best bright light treatment is sunlight; however, since in the winter it’s not accessible, there are blue light-therapy lamps or glasses

that may be used instead. These lights, mimic some effects of the sun, lower depression by increasing serotonin, and help with sleep. One study showed that subjects who used light-therapy boxes for three weeks had a 58% drop in their depression scores. Bright light therapy also helps to reset our circadian rhythm to normal. Be sure to get your early morning sunlight, best before 7 am, along with exercise to receive multiple help benefits at once.¹³

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- Expose yourself to 30-60 minutes of sunlight within 10 minutes after waking up.
- Or use blue light therapy glasses or a medical-grade light therapy box.

7. Dodge Negative Thinking

For years, we’ve known about the power of positive thinking to improve health, but research from Ohio State University shows that it may be even more important to avoid negative thinking. “While the ‘power of positive thinking is encouraged as a way to improve health and well-being, this study showed that it is more important to avoid negative thinking.”¹⁴

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a treatment that has been shown to effectively target and treat thought patterns that affect the way we feel. Many times,

anxiety, depression, anger, and eating disorders, are a result of the way we react to circumstances in our lives.

How can you do that? The moment we are conscious that we are thinking a negative, unconstructive thought, we need to replace it with a positive thought. Our brain is plastic and trainable. As you keep putting the brakes on your negative thoughts and replacing them with positive ones, you will establish a healthy habit that will defeat depression and change your brain chemistry.

8. Social Support

Having a good social support system is also very important in preventing and treating depression. A meta-analysis of 64 studies showed that good communication with others decreases anxiety while improving a sense of wellbeing¹³ Also, persons who have positive social support, have improved communication skills, which helps to reduce depression and other mental disorders.¹⁵ Be a friend, serve others, and volunteer, and as you bless others you will be happy and blessed.

PRACTICAL TIPS:

- Keep in touch with family, neighbors, and friends regularly.
- Attend church regularly and serve others.

- Volunteer in the community

- Make new friends.

- Remember to smile!



9. Trust in God

Did you know that spirituality and a belief in God can improve depression, anxiety, and mental health? We also know that spirituality and a strong religious belief system also have a strong positive effect on reducing heart disease, hypertension, and even cancer.

Researchers from Duke University have done many studies on religiosity and health.



In one study, 94 depressed individuals were given a test to track their emotional health. Some test questions focused on the individual's inner religiosity, church attendance, and church-related activities. Results showed, that during the study, religion helped 54% of the subjects recover from depression.¹⁶

What's remarkable is these individuals not only went to church, but they had an "intrinsic religion." In other words, they had a personal relationship with God. The researchers stated that "depressed patients with higher "inner religiosity" had more rapid remissions than patients with lower scores." It's interesting, the researchers stated individuals with "inner religiosity" recovered 80% sooner from depression with every 10-point increase in the religiosity test score. But those who had an external religious activity had a much lesser effect.¹⁶

So how does that apply to us? It's not enough for us to go through the forms of religion—church attendance and prayer. To recover from depression, we need to have a personal relationship with God where we talk to Him in prayer, study the Scriptures, and do Christian meditation. This will give meaning and purpose to our lives and will free us from depression.

How to trust God

Would you like to have that deep and genuine relationship with God? You may! Open the Bible and read how much God loves and cares for you. Read the book of John, the Psalms, and many powerful promises of faith, courage, and hope. Before you begin reading, pray and ask God to help you understand the Scriptures. Then believe that He does. Thank Him for it! Read Matthew 6:25-34 and learn the secret of why you need not be depressed and anxious.

Some great Bible promises for you:

- Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7 NKJV).

- “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1).

- “Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

How to stop anxiety and depression

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-8)

Practical steps

1. **Stop being anxious and depressed** about all your problems.
2. **Tell God** everything you are anxious and depressed about in prayer.
3. **Thank God** for answering your request. You do this by faith, believing, that the All-powerful God will answer you at the best time.
4. **Then, God will give you unimaginable peace.**

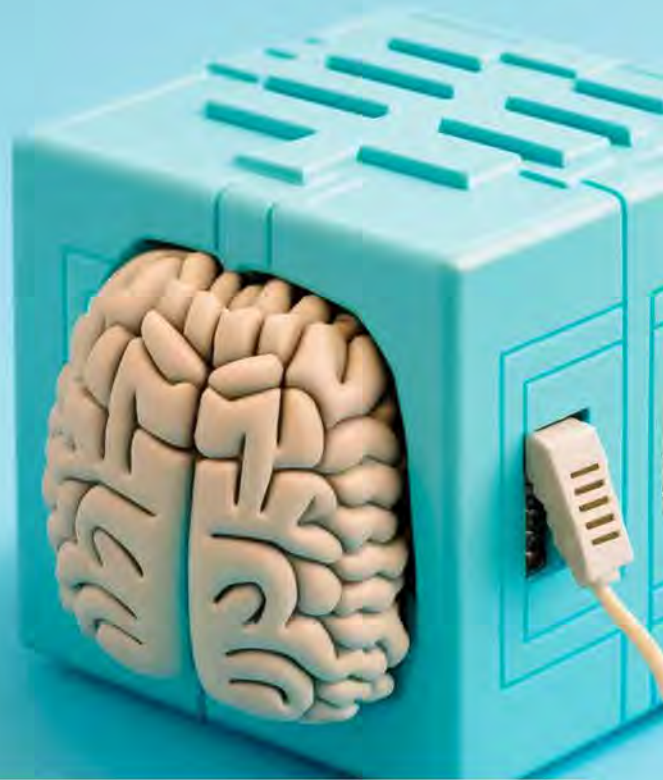
Would you like to be free from depression and anxiety? You can begin today by adopting these 9 lifestyle principles: regular exercise, restful sleep, healthy diet, deep breathing, listening to classical music, avoiding negative thinking, bright light, social support, and a relationship with your loving God. He says: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

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Assess Your Brain Health in 6 AREAS



I. The Anterior Cingulate Gyrus: COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Often

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I become upset when things don't go my way. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I hold grudges. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I become upset when things are out of place. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I get stuck on negative thoughts. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tend to be argumentative. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | If things aren't done a certain way, I become upset. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have difficulty in seeing other options in situations. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I worry often. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tend to addictive/compulsive behavior. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I dislike change. |

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Don't let your brain get stuck on holding grudges or resentments. Read the article on how to forgive. If you can't get over hurts, consider Christian counseling.
- Lower your intake of protein and increase your complex carbohydrates: whole grains, legumes (beans), fruits and vegetables.
- Work on shifting your attention by trying different activities.
- Trying using St. John's Wort supplements, which may boost your levels of serotonin, the neurotransmitter which increases positive thoughts. Consult a health care provider before taking any supplements.

II. The Prefrontal Cortex: THINKING

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Often

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I lack attention to detail. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I don't have clear goals. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's difficult for me to express empathy for others. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I am impulsive, saying and doing this without thinking. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I need nicotine or caffeine to focus. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | It's difficult for me to sustain attention. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tend to procrastinate. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I'm restless. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I interrupt people or blurt out answers before questions are completed. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I get easily distracted. |

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Take more time to plan your schedule and make goals.
- To boost blood flow, do regular aerobic exercise powerwalking, rowing, jogging, swimming, bicycling)
- Get help to be more organized and efficient from an organized friend or a life coach.

III. The Limbic System: EMOTIONS

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Often

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel bored.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel sad.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am dissatisfied.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am negative.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I am bored.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	My energy is low.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have crying spells.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have chronic low esteem.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel socially isolated.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have crying spells.

HOW TO IMPROVE

- To increase positive emotions, engage in intense aerobic exercise.
- To increase your energy, switch to a vegetarian diet.
- Take your mind off yourself and experience the joy of helping others. Take time each week to volunteer: tutor a child, volunteer in a homeless shelter, or help an elderly neighbor.

IV. The Basal Ganglia: ANXIETY

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Often

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I tend to think of the worst in situations.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel nervous and anxious.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I avoid conflict.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I experience panic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I have an excessive fear of being judged by others.

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Listen to relaxing classical music.
- Eliminate caffeine and alcohol from your diet.
- Engage in daily prayer, Bible reading, and Christian meditation. Do relaxation exercises.
- Learn cognitive therapy techniques to help overcome excessive negative thinking.



V. Memory and Speech: THE TEMPORAL LOBE

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Often

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have periods of forgetfulness and memory problems. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have trouble finding the right word to say. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sometimes I feel I am somewhere where I have not been before. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have a short fuse. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have times when I'm highly irritable. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I am sensitive or display mild paranoia. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have dark thoughts such as suicidal or homicidal thoughts. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have unstable moods. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have a history of a headache injury. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I misinterpret comments as negative when they were not meant to be. |

HOW TO IMPROVE

- To boost oxygenated blood to the brain, increase daily exercise, thereby ensuring adequate neural health for memory consolidation.
- Try taking GABA or valerian root supplements because abnormally low activity in the temporal lobe is associated with a deficiency in the GABA neurotransmitter. Ginkgo biloba may also improve memory. Talk to a health care provider before using supplement, especially if you're taking prescription drugs.

VI. The Cerebellum: MOTOR COORDINATION

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Very Often

- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have difficulty keeping up with conversations. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I'm sensitive to touch or tags on clothing. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have the habit of having multiple piles of stuff around the house. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have difficulty maintaining an organized workspace. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have trouble keeping up conversations. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I am sensitive to light, and bothered by glare, headlights, or streetlights. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I seem more sensitive to my surroundings and environment than others are. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I tend to be clumsy or accident-prone. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I have trouble learning new information or routines. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | I am more sensitive to noise than others. |

HOW TO IMPROVE

- Have a lifestyle that helps develop coordination and decreases your chance of brain injury.
- Try coordination exercises: table tennis and others.
- Eliminate caffeine and alcohol and other drugs that that interfere with your brain's ability to coordinate neural messages across the cortex.



QUIZ RESULTS

If you answered "often" or very often on 5 or more questions in one section, its highly likely this area of you brain health needs your attention.



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MORE JOY

Less Stress & Sadness



Nearly **8 in 10** Americans feel stressed at least 1/week.



People who watch TV are 26% more likely to get depressed. Every hour of watching TV can increase your risk of depression by 5%.



WE NEED thoughts to balance the **3 POSITIVE** power of 1 negative thought.



80% of our thoughts are negative

and 95% are repetitive.



A good laugh can relieve your muscles of stress for up to



due to stimulating circulation.

Baroque music is most effective in improving mental health.



Waking up just 1 hour earlier could reduce a person's risk of major depression by 23% according to a new genetic study.





Bright light therapy. People, who are daily exposed to early morning sunlight or bright light therapy (10,000 LUX) for 20 min. before 7 am, have an improvement in depression in about 2 weeks.



Drink 8+ cups of water.

Men who drank less than 2 glasses of water daily had a 73% higher risk of depression. Women had a 54% higher risk of depression vs. those who drank 5+ glasses/per day.



Plant-based diet.

Eating 8 or more fruit and vegetables per day predicts greater life satisfaction and happiness in just 2 weeks.



Adults who do daily vigorous daily exercise were 25% less likely to develop depression or an anxiety disorder over the next 5 years.



Breathe in slowly through the nose counting to 5. Exhale slowly through your mouth counting to 5-6. Aim for 30-45 min. daily.

Gardening.

Studies show about 20 minutes of gardening can make us happier and more relaxed due to an increase in the neurotransmitter serotonin.



A survey reports that 62% of American adults say they need more forgiveness in their personal lives.



People who did 3 small acts of kindness 3x a day twice a week for 5 weeks, reported being less depressed and anxious. 75% of them continued doing acts of kindness after the study because of the benefits they received.

TRUST IN GOD.

Studies show that 54% of depressed individuals who have a genuine relationship with God, who pray, and attend church regularly, recover from depression.



Gratitude lowers the stress hormone cortisol by 23%.

Regular journaling in a gratitude journal lowers depressive symptoms by 30%+.



Boost Your Mood with Food

Paul M. Balbach, FNP NPC



Have you ever felt butterflies in your stomach when you were nervous about something, and wondered why? These were signals from your “second brain,” the gut. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of happiness and well-being, helps to regulate our mood, sleep, appetite, and pain, but 90% of the serotonin is produced in the gut. Your gut (gastrointestinal tract) is lined with 100 million nerve cells. So, the “brain in our gut” not only digests your food but also guides your emotions. Your gut is regulated by billions of “good bacteria” that make up your microbiome. When the balance between the good and bad bacteria is upset, disease may occur—which also includes mental disorders.

But besides the gut bacteria, “are there foods that can improve your mood and even depression?” The answer is: Yes, your diet affects your mood, your mental health, and brain function for better or worse. The new field of “nutritional psychiatry” has linked certain foods with depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders, while other foods produce feelings of well-being, contentment, and happiness.



Premium foods for the brain

Depression is a public health problem, like the flu. But it is more deadly. Nearly 10% of Americans over 21 suffer from depression, with the greatest increase among teens and young adults, reaching 17% in 2020.^{1,2}

But it's remarkable to see how individuals of diverse backgrounds have taken on a positive mental outlook by simply changing their diet, adding exercise, and other healthy lifestyle habits.

Brain-boosting Diet

The bright side is that changing your diet can lower depression and boost your mood.

A study reported in the *Nutrition Journal* looked at the mood of subjects who were put on a vegetarian diet compared to an omnivorous diet. They reported a more positive mood and less depression among vegetarians than meat eaters.³ So why does a vegetarian diet decrease one's odds of depression? Inflammation is the culprit. Research shows that: 1) Individuals who are depressed have higher inflammatory markers 2) and those with inflammatory illnesses have higher rates of depression.⁴

Can an anti-inflammatory diet prevent depression? Researchers followed the diets of 43,000 women without depression for 12 years. Those women who ate an inflammatory diet (junk food, soda, refined, grains, and meat) became depressed. "This finding suggests that chronic inflammation is associated with a processed food diet and depression."⁵

The good news is that a plant-based diet can **lower inflammation by 30% within just 2 weeks!** Why? This is due to the antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties found in whole plants.⁵

1. Fruits and vegetables

We know that fruit and vegetables have been associated with a lower risk of coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and certain cancers. But can a higher fruit and vegetable intake also improve depression and mental health? The answer is yes!

But how many fruits and vegetables would you have to eat to see benefits? One study showed that increasing fruit and vegetables to 8 or more servings per day were



predictive of increased life satisfaction, happiness, and well-being. This improvement can be compared to the psychological benefit of being unemployed vs. getting a job.⁶ That's the power of eating fruits and vegetables!

It's great to have improved well-being, but can eating fruits and vegetables prevent anxiety and depression in the future? A review of dozens of studies found that every 100 g (1/2 apple) of increased fruit intake reduces the risk of future depression by 3%!⁷

How long does it take to see the benefits of increased fruit and vegetable intake? In this study, young adults were placed in one of 3 groups; the first group ate a regular diet, the **second one** was encouraged to eat more fruits and vegetables, and the **third** was given 2 extra servings of fruits and vegetables daily. The results showed that the group that ate 2 extra fruits and veggies daily had improved "psychological well-being, increased vitality, and motivation **in just 2 weeks.**"⁸ This is the power of plants for your mental well-being! Adults, children, and seniors can improve their memory and cognition, by adding 1/2–1 cup of blueberries to their daily diet.⁸

Practical Tip: Eat 8 or more servings* of fruits and vegetables/per day. Eat 1/2–1 cup blueberries or berries daily.^{9, 10} *(1 serving = 1 medium fruit, 1/2 cup cooked veggies or 1 cup raw veggies).

2. Tryptophan

Did you know that Tryptophan makes people nicer? Tryptophan is an amino acid

Figure 1

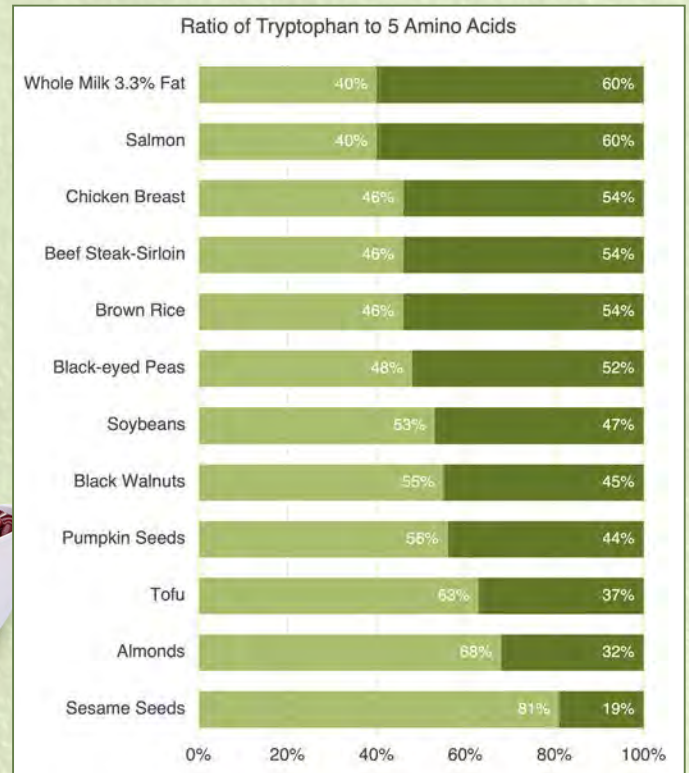
Foods High in Tryptophan¹¹

Food	Serving	Tryptophan (mg)
Spirulina dried seaweed	100g	100g
Chia seeds	100g	100g
Tofu, firm	100g	100g
Pumpkin and squash seeds	100g	100g
Wheat germ	100g	100g
Sesame tahini	100g	100g
Sesame seeds	100g	100g
Sunflower seeds	100g	100g
Black Walnuts	100g	100g
Flax seeds	100g	100g
Cashews	100g	100g



Figure 2

Tryptophan Ratio to 5 Competing Amino Acids¹³



that can be converted into serotonin, an important neurotransmitter in our prefrontal cortex. Serotonin “the happy hormone” can improve our mood, sleep, and ability to deal with stress while relieving anxiety and depression. But serotonin is not found in food; it can only be made from *tryptophan* which has to be obtained from our diet.

What are the food sources of tryptophan? See **Figure 1**.¹¹ The best approach to having ideal levels of tryptophan in the brain is to eat complex carbohydrates like legumes (beans), whole grains, nuts, fruits, and vegetables. So, a plant-based diet is the best for producing adequate serotonin, but a meat-based diet lowers the production of serotonin, increasing the likelihood of depression. Some depressed individuals are so sensitive that even a one-day low tryptophan intake can make them relapse back into depression.¹²

Animal protein causes depressive symptoms because 5 amino acids compete to prevent tryptophan from entering the brain. These amino acids are high in animal protein. Any

food that has a large quantity of these amino acids *will reduce the flow of tryptophan to the brain*.¹² So, even if your diet is average in tryptophan, but is high in these 5 amino acids, you may still be deficient in tryptophan. See **Figure 2** for the Tryptophan to 5 competing amino acids ratio. Notice that milk, beef, and chicken have a small amount of tryptophan relative to the 5 amino acids, making them a poor brain food to fight depression. In contrast, tofu is high in tryptophan relative to the 5 amino acids, which makes it an excellent brain food to produce serotonin and fight depression.¹⁴

3. Tyrosine

Tyrosine is another amino acid that can boost neurotransmitters (dopamine and norepinephrine) in the brain which is responsible for our happiness and well-being. Individuals with higher levels of tyrosine in the brain have improved mood, cognition, alertness, and energy, as well as low-

Figure 3

Tyrosine content of Foods¹⁶

Food	Serving Size	Tyrosine (mg)
Squash & pumpkin seeds	100g	1079
Tahini	100g	746
Black walnuts	100g	740
Sesame seeds	100g	710
Tofu, firm	100g	701
Sunflower seeds	100g	661
Edamame	100g	630
Oats, raw	100g	573
Cashews	100g	508
Lentils	100g	477
Black beans	100g	430
Spirulina	7g	173
Wild rice	100	169

er stress.¹⁵ See **Figure 3** for food sources of tyrosine. Although tryptophan and tyrosine are abundant in meat, plant foods rich in carbohydrates are the best for getting these important nutrients into the brain.¹⁵

4. Omega-3-Fats

One of the most common reasons people have mental health issues is due to omega-fat deficiency. Omega-3 fats are essential fats that the body can't make and therefore must be added to the diet. Research studies show that omega-3 fats are effective with major depression and bipolar disorders. They are highly concentrated in the brain and are a good memory-booster.¹⁷

The symptoms of omega-3 deficiency include mood swings, depression, poor memory, dry skin, and extreme fatigue. Supplementation with omega-3 fats has helped individuals with depression and bipolar disorders, ADHD, and Alzheimer's disease. Omega-3s are anti-inflammatory and thus reduce the risk of chronic diseases.

Problems with omega-3s from fish

Most people get their omega-3 from eating fish or taking fish supplements. Cold-water fish are high in omega-3s **not because fish make omega-3s**, but because fish get it from eating cold-water seaweed.

Although some health professionals recommend fish oil as a source of omega-3 fats, there are problems with fish consumption. Fish are contaminated with pollutants (PCPB, dioxins, DDT), and heavy metals (mercury, lead, cadmium) which are harmful to our bodies and brains.¹⁸

Fish concentrate toxins in their fat tissues. So, the toxins present in the water in small amounts will be 1,000 to one million times greater amount in the fat of the fish due to biomagnification—how contamination increases as you move up the food chain. These high levels of toxins significantly increase the risk of mental health problems and cancer.¹⁹ High levels of mercury in fish are especially dangerous for children. For these reasons, fish should be avoided.

Plant sources of Omega-3 fats

The best and safest sources of omega-3 fats are found in plants, not in fish. See **Figure 4**.

Figure 4

Plant Food Sources of Omega-3 Fats²⁰

Food	Serving Size	Omega-3 (mg)
Flaxseed, ground	1 oz./28g	6,388
Chia seeds	1 oz./28g	4,915
Walnuts, English	1 oz./28g	2,524
Wheat germ oil	1 Tbsp	932
Edamame - green soy	1 cup/155g	569
Spinach, cooked	1 cup	381
Pecans	1 oz./28g	276
Avocado	1 whole	221
Sweet red pepper	1 oz./28g	217
Sesame seeds	1oz./28g	105
Blueberries, fresh	1 cup/148g	86

How much omega-3s do we need? Dr. Neil Nedley recommends "a 9000-milligram dose of omega-3 fats for bipolar disorder and 3000 milligrams for major depression." He says, "You do not have to be bipolar or depressed to benefit from this recipe, and many of my patients have improved their mental health using this simple food."²¹



Practical Tips:

• An easy way to include omega-3 fats in your diet is to put the Flax-Walnut Sprinkle on your cereal. See p. 63 for the recipe.

• Add 2 heaping tablespoons of the Flax-Walnut Sprinkle on your cereal or in your smoothie daily.

• 2 Tablespoons of Flax-Walnuts sprinkle = 857 mg Omega-3 fats

SUPPLEMENTS FOR BRAIN HEALTH

1. Vitamin B12

Vitamin B₁₂ is critical in producing brain chemicals that affect our mood and prevent depression. Symptoms of vitamin B₁₂ deficiency are frequent forgetfulness, poor coordination, tingling in the arms or legs, and fatigue. People over 50 are more likely to be deficient because they don't absorb vitamin B₁₂ as well, consequently, supplementation is critical. It is recommended to take a daily vitamin B₁₂ supplement, (5-10 mg hydroxocobalamin) or 1000 mcg cyanocobalamin chewed or taken under the tongue. Eat B₁₂-fortified plant-based foods: nutritional yeast flakes, nori seaweed, dry cereal, milk, tempeh, and yogurt besides B₁₂ supplements.²²

2. Folate

Folate is an essential B vitamin that produces certain neurotransmitters which make us “feel good.” Folate is important in treating depression and psychiatric illnesses and improving memory and cognitive function. We need a minimum of 400 ug of folate per day for ideal physical health, but 1000 mg per day is recommended for optimal brain health.²³ (See **Figure 5**).

Figure 5

Plant Sources of Folate²⁴

Food	Serving Size	Folate (mcg)
Black-eyed peas, cooked	1 cup/172g	358
Lentils, cooked	1 cup/198g	358
Pinto beans, cooked	1 cup/171g	294
Black beans, cooked	1 cup/172g	256
Asparagus, boiled	1 cup/180g	268
Beets, raw	1 cup/136g	148
Avocado	½	82
Spinach, raw	1 cup/30g	58
Broccoli	1 cup/91g	57
Orange	1 large	55
Papaya	1 cup/140g	53
Brussels sprouts	½ cup/78g	47



5. Zinc

Zinc deficiency has been shown to induce depression and anxiety-like behaviors, and supplementation has been used to treat major depression and anxiety. 150 seniors were given a 30 mg zinc supplement while the control group received none. The results showed improved depression and anxiety scores with zinc supplementation.²⁶

Plant food sources of zinc are found in beans, chickpeas, lentils, tofu, walnuts, cashew nuts, chia seeds, ground flax, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, 100% whole-wheat bread, and quinoa. It would take a well-planned diet to get adequate zinc from food alone. Supplementation with 15 mg zinc is recommended.

6. Vitamin D

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that is essential for many cellular activities it is anti-inflammatory and neuroprotective. Research shows that vitamin D deficiency is linked with schizophrenia, and Alzheimer's. A National Health and Nutritional Survey showed that people deficient in Vitamin D have a significantly higher risk of depression than those with normal vitamin D levels. It is important to keep our blood vitamin D levels within the normal range. The best way to get vitamin D is by sunbathing. Vitamin D₃ is recommended for adults.^{27, 28}

Low-grade fuel for the brain

What you eat today can either help you feel happier or grumpier and more depressed.

Let's say at lunchtime you go to the local fast-food restaurant and eat a hamburger, French fries, and a large milkshake. How do you feel afterward? But what if the next day you prepare yourself a large salad, vegetarian chili over a baked potato at home? Which meal do you think will be best for your mood and brain? You know the answer already!

Now let's look at how meat-based diets, refined carbohydrates, processed foods, alcohol, and caffeine affect our mood.

1. Meat-based diets and arachidonic acid

Research shows that a diet high in arachidonic acid may harm mental health by causing brain inflammation. Arachidonic acid is a type of fat found in chicken, eggs, and other animal foods. To see the effect of arachidonic acid and saturated fat on the brain, researchers took a group of omnivores and divided them into three groups: Group 1: Had a regular meat/poultry diet. Group 2: Had only fish. Group 3: Had a plant-based diet with no eggs, meat, poultry, or fish. *After just 2 weeks, the plant-based group had a greater reduction in stress, anxiety, and depression.*²⁹

The high arachidonic acid levels in meat also impair the peak function of our frontal lobe—the center for judgment, wisdom, and foresight. Meat and animal products are also high in saturated fat and cholesterol and increase the risk of cancer, heart disease, and parasites.

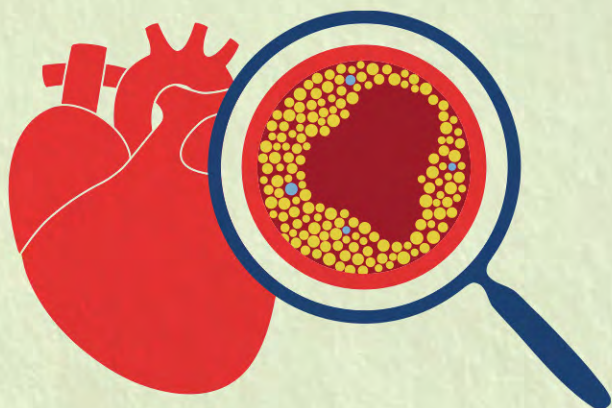
2. Bad Brain Foods

Processed meats, dairy, ice cream, chips, candy bars and sodas, white flour products, and foods high in sugar drain the brain and have been linked to a higher frequency of depression. Especially harmful are sodas, colas, and sugary drinks.³⁰ When you eat high-sugar foods, they temporarily increase serotonin levels in your brain and make you "feel happy." But then the pancreas releases a lot of insulin, which causes your blood sugar to fall quickly. The rapid rise and fall in blood sugar makes you lethargic, and irritable and decreases your ability to focus. The best plan is to limit sweets and have them as an occasional treat.

3. Cholesterol

Elevated blood cholesterol has been linked to depression and lower cognitive function. Artery walls thicken due to this build-up of fat, and blood flow decreases to the frontal lobe of the brain. Cholesterol is found only in animal foods—poultry, meat, dairy, eggs, and seafood. Especially harmful

are foods that have oxidized cholesterol—custards made with milk, eggs, and sugar, ice cream, pancake mixes, and parmesan cheese.³¹ Plant foods have no cholesterol. Lowering cholesterol will improve mood, and depression and lower impulsivity.



4. Alcohol

Alcohol interferes with dopamine production, and thus it the action of the frontal lobe.³² You can receive the same health benefits from resveratrol by drinking grape juice or eating dark red grapes without the bad health side effects of alcohol.

The Original Plant-Based Diet

We know with all certainty that our Creator cares about our mental health. (See John 10:10; Galatians 5:22, 23). He created us to have productive, joyous lives, and



healthy relationships. John 13:35; Philippians 2:3). After sin entered our world, God made provision for a healthy mind to handle hardships and affliction (James 1:2-4). Our Creator established health laws in our being that regulate our bodies. For this reason, He designed the ideal diet for human beings—whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts (Genesis 1:29; 3:18). This is the optimal diet for mental, physical, and spiritual health. No wonder science confirms that a plant-based diet is the most beneficial for promoting mental and physical health!

Choose premium fuel for a positive mood

Imagine your brain at work! It is on the job 24/7, even while you are sleeping. It oversees your thoughts, movements, heart-beat, and breathing, and regulates your senses. For this reason, it needs a constant supply of energy from the food you eat.

Like a fine luxury automobile, your brain runs best on premium fuel! So, when you eat whole plant foods that are packed with antioxidants, phytochemicals, fiber, vitamins, and minerals, you are nourishing your brain and protecting it from oxidative stress (imbalance of free radicals and antioxidants) which can damage your cells.

But if you put in your body low-grade fuel like red meat, animal foods, and a lot of fat and sugar, your brain, like that fine luxury car, can get damaged. A meat-based diet promotes oxidative stress and inflammation in the body and brain, worsening depression, and other mental disorders. Animal foods also contribute to heart disease, strokes, diabetes, hypertension, and other degenerative diseases. This is logical! When we deprive our brains of superior-quality fuel, we must suffer the consequences!

Your brain . . . a marvelous machine created by a loving Creator deserves the very best fuel! Why not choose to adopt a plant-based lifestyle, so you too can optimize your emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health? *

* When transitioning to a plant-based diet, it's imperative to include a variety of whole plant foods, and if possible, consult a Registered Dietitian for professional support.

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Improve your Mood with



WATER

Water! Water! Water! It keeps your circulation moving smoothly, eases joint movement, and aids digestion and weight loss while helping to absorb the nutrients in your food. These are just a few benefits of drinking water, but did you know that water can also improve your mental health?

Keep in mind that 20% of our total water intake comes from water-rich food: lettuce, leafy greens, cucumbers, bell peppers, celery, berries and melons.

About **75%** percent of our brain tissue is water.



Research has linked dehydration to depression and anxiety because mental health is propelled primarily by our brain's activity. Drinking adequate amounts of water daily is important in managing stress, anxiety, and depression.

A study was done in 2018 with 3300 adults to see if there was a link between water intake and anxiety and depression. The results showed that men who drank less than 2 glasses of water a day had a 73% higher risk of depression than those who drank more than 5 glasses/per day. Women who drank less than 2 glasses of water a day had a 54% greater risk of depression. They found that anxiety was higher in individuals who didn't drink enough water, but the link between dehydration was stronger for depression.¹

A study in 2014 showed that people who usually drank lots of water felt less calm, less content, and more tense when they drank less water. But when they increased their water intake, they felt more happiness.²



How much water should we drink?

Take your weight in pounds and divide it by two. That is the number of ounces you need to drink.
Ex. 150 lbs / 2 = 75 oz. = 9 ½ eight oz. glasses.

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How to Deal with STRESS

By Emil Barbu, MD

What takes up most of your free time? What social media sites are you browsing? Which videos or television shows are you watching? How do you feel after such activity? Are you feeling calm, or are you stressed and agitated? Many social media outlets, movies, videos, and television programs are causing a negative stress response instead of relaxing us.

We all have stressful situations in our lives, but we want to learn how to deal with them effectively without ruining our health.

During my second year at university, I experienced a severe state of stress and deep depression. This was mostly due to financial shortages, personal problems, difficult exams, and being a long distance away from my loving family. My "friends" had let me down. Things were going so badly that I was thinking of giving up my studies. I continued my daily activities only because I had to, not because I found pleasure in doing them. However, I continued to pray to God, hoping that one day He would revitalize my life and restore my happiness.

In answer to my prayers a friend, without knowing what I was going through, gave me the book: "When Heaven Is Silent" by Ronald Dunn. I read the book and started implementing its strategies. As a result, I ended up re-studying the Bible. My mind was re-connected to heaven. I was encouraged and



It was then that I realized that most of my negative feelings were related with the way I looked at things in my life—my thoughts! I recognized that when I meditate on spiritual and heavenly things, what happens on earth becomes less important and stress disappears. I started singing daily and smiling at everyone. My life was changed!

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is an adaptive response when our body experiences a stimulus from our environment. The father of stress research, Hans Hugo Bruno Selye, describes it as a response to any demand which may be chemical, biological, or psychological. The stress response changes how our body functions, especially in our endocrine or hormonal systems. When we experience sudden stress, our muscles contract, our heart rate increases, our blood pressure fluctuates, our blood vessels constrict, and other bodily changes occur as well. These changes occur because the nervous system signals to several glands to produce stress hormones.



Effects of sudden stress vs. ongoing stress

Stressors that affect our emotional well-being also include our inner dialogue or self-talk, what we tell ourselves about ourselves, life, and others. These messages travel like vehicles down pathways in the brain. Stressors that cause an emotional reaction are unique in their ability to produce psychological tension. However, the extent of the effect varies among individuals. In other words, the same stimuli do not produce the same stress response in all individuals in exactly the same way, and each stressor will not produce the same response in the same individual every time.

Our body is designed to deal with sudden, short-term stress, but continuous stress can damage the body. With diabetes for example, continuous activation of stress hormones can keep blood sugar levels high and put one at higher risk for diabetes complications.

Over time, chronic stress contributes to high blood pressure, causes atherosclerosis (fatty buildup in the arteries), and causes brain changes that may also contribute to anxiety, depression, and addiction. See Table 1.

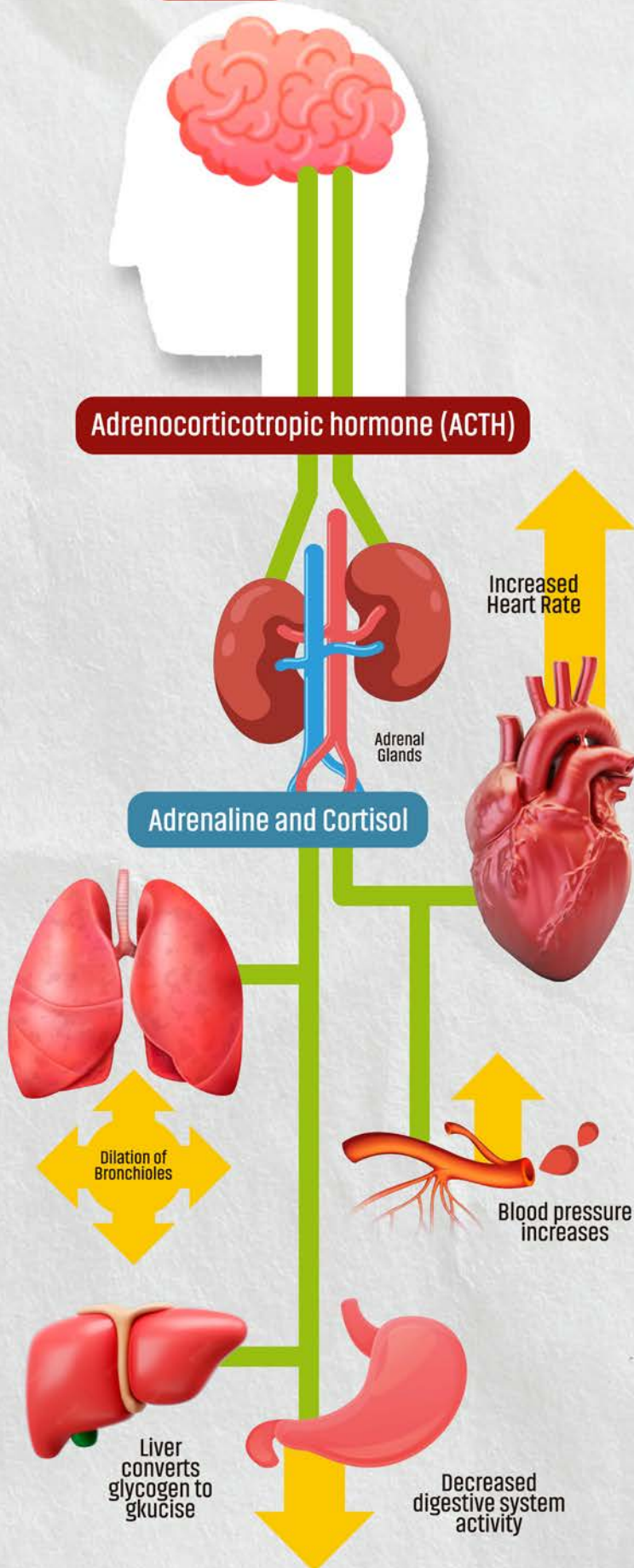
Long-term stress can affect every aspect of our being: physical, mental, social, and spiritual, but it causes the greatest harm to our mental health. If we have poor mental health, our quality of life will suffer physically, socially, and spiritually.

Table 1

Diseases Aggravated by Stress

Heart disease
Asthma
Eczema
Psoriasis
Irritable bowel syndrome
Reproductive health
Hip fractures
Anxiety disorders
Depression

Brain Hypothalamus



Identify your stressors

Sit down in a quiet place, where you can be alone without distractions, and reflect on your life. Ask yourself, "What are the stressors in my life? Where are the stressors? Why does this situation/person/event stress me?"

Table 2 lists some common stressors that individuals experience. **Table 3** lists major life stressors.

Table 2

Common Life Stressors

- Relationship problems at home
- New or increased work responsibilities
- Chronic sleep deprivation
- Financial strain
- Health problems
- Perceptions of your environment
- Being overwhelmed or disengaged
- Family or career conflicts
- Time deadlines
- Isolation and loneliness
- Being unhappy in your job¹

How is it possible that identical stressors may have no effect on one person, while the same stressors may have very negative effects on another? This positive reaction to a stressor is called "eustress." Eustress refers to stress that leads to a positive and beneficial response, such as being excited about a new job or buying a new house. The extent that eustress can have such an effect on

Table 3

Major Life Stressors

- Moving to a new location
- Chronic illness or injury
- Emotional problems—depression, anxiety, anger, grief, guilt
- Taking care of an elderly/sick family member
- Loss of a loved one
- Traumatic events—natural disaster, theft, rape, or violence

our physiology is that it will be reflected in physical changes in our blood vessels, heart, kidneys, and other areas of the body.

Why is it that some temporary stress is beneficial to some people, while to others it means chaos and distress? The answer lies in how in what we think about the stressor. After identifying your stressor, you have two options: to remove or avoid the stressor or to make a healthy adjustment. Read the article *"Rethink What You Think"* p. 49 to learn how to retrain your thoughts and positively manage your emotions and stress.

LIFESTYLE STRATEGIES TO REDUCE STRESS

Research indicates that chronic stress causes changes in the brain that may cause anxiety, depression, and addiction. It also promotes artery-clogging deposits in blood vessels, causes high blood pressure, and may also contribute to obesity.² Let's learn and apply strategies that will help us cope with stress.

1. Choose your words wisely

Have you ever thought that we have the power to reduce our stress and the stress of family members by the words we speak? A lot of our stress response is affected by the words we heard in childhood. Did you hear pleasant and encouraging words? In difficult moments, did your parents say, "Let's pray . . . God is powerful," or "God can help us right now just as He helped Daniel in the lion's den, and David facing Goliath?" If you heard these words of faith and encouragement, then you have stored these words deep within your memory, and they will generate thoughts that will bring comfort and a positive outlook even to the harshest external stressors. The Scriptures describes the power of these positive words: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Proverbs 25:11).

Each day, we build our capacity to deal with stressors—positively or negatively—



through the influence of our environment—by means of family, friends, school, church, the internet, books, movies, and culture. From the day we are born until our last breath we are constantly learning how to relate to stress. The words we hear and the words we speak will either promote mental health and happiness or result in anxiety, depression, fear, helplessness, and disease.

Our words create thoughts leading to different decisions and actions in our daily life. Every word carries with it not just an informational component, but also an emotional one. The emotional information we receive from our words is stored in our brain and produces chemical messengers in the brain (neurotransmitters) which are released into the bloodstream. These affect the health of every cell in our body. Words that lead to worry and fear will produce neuropeptides that activate bad genes

which disrupt our cell growth and function. While words that reflect love and peace produce neuropeptides that activate good genes and help our brain cells to grow and function.³

The word of God has the power to affect our mental health positively, producing life and health. We read, "My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; Do not let my words depart from your eyes; Keep them in the midst of your heart; For they are life to those who find them and health to all their flesh" (Proverbs 40:21-23). God's word is medicine. To benefit from it, we must put it first in our lives, and make it our final authority. We can't overdose on God's medicine. The more we take, the more peace we have.

2. Help others

Another powerful way to control stress is to help others or help with a worthy cause or volunteer. When we focus on the needs of others and do our best to make them happy, our thoughts turn away from self and this reduces our stress and anxiety.

3. Exercise the stress away!

Exercise increases our overall health and our sense of well-being. Research shows that regular physical exercise is an important strategy for controlling stress and improving our mental health. Dr. John Ratey, the renowned psychiatrist states: "Regular aerobic activity calms the body, so that it can handle more stress before the serious response involving heart rate and stress hormones kicks in. . .

Regular aerobic exercise can help our mental and cardiovascular health; it can calm our spirits and improve metabolism and immunity. Exercise can invigorate and at the same time relax while dispersing stress. Exercise increases the production of the brain's natural feel-good neurotransmitters called endorphins. These neurotransmitters make us feel relaxed and optimistic. Exercise can also improve our mood and help prevent anxiety and depression.

Outdoor exercise like walking, hiking, jogging is best. A casual stroll in the woods, by a river, or on the beach is a pleasant way to reduce stress. Walking in the woods can lower stress and anxiety, increase immunity, and have other wonderful health benefits.

But what's even better at reducing stress is exercise like gardening, chopping wood and yard work.

4. Eat a healthy diet

Read the article "Boost Your Mood with Food" on page 22 to learn which diet is best for optimal mental health.

5. Eliminate caffeine and alcohol

According to Dr. Matthew Walker, drinking any quantity of caffeinated beverages throughout the day, no matter how small, will interfere with the quality and quantity of your sleep. Caffeine has a half-life of 7 hours, meaning it takes 7 hours to remove only half of it from our body after we ingest it. Throughout the day, adenosine (a chemical in our cells) accumulates, and when it binds to receptors in the brain, it makes us tired and prepares us for sleep. But caffeine blocks this binding to the receptors which leads to poor sleep quality, and a decreased ability to respond positively to stress.⁵

Research from Oxford University shows that alcohol also has negative effects on how we handle stress. Any quantity of alcohol, however small, will destroy neurons. Eventually, this will lead to death of brain cells and shrinking of the brain.

During chronic stress, a large part of the blood flow to the brain is redirected to the **hindbrain** and **midbrain**, away from the **frontal lobe** which is the area for the will, spirituality, and logical thinking. So, instead of consciously deciding, planning, and acting with good judgment, we will react unconsciously.⁷



6. Sleep regularly

Sleep plays a major role in how we manage our emotions, behavior, and stress. Every minute of sleep lost cannot be recovered in the systemic function of our brain and body. During the day, the cognitive bits of information arrive at the **hippocampus** (a structure sitting very close to our brain stem). This information is received just like messages in an inbox. During sleep, the information is transmitted from the hippocampus to the **frontal lobe**, where this information is sorted into different categories so it can be easily accessed each day as the need arises. The same sorting process also happens with the emotional information we receive.

Throughout the day, the emotional inputs arrive in the inbox of the **amygdala** (part of the brain involved with emotions). During sleep, these emotional inputs are also transferred to the emotional categories (happy, sad, dangerous, etc.). Transferring the emotional information to categories “empties the inbox” and prepares the amygdala to receive new information the following day.

If we don’t get adequate sleep, the “emotional inbox” stays full of information

from the previous day, then any type of emotional input received the next day will create stress. This occurs because the information is still stuck in the “inbox.” Therefore, our emotions will not be controlled by the logical portion of the brain (**cerebral cortex**). Consequently, our feelings of agitation, anxiety, and anger may increase. The next day we may have decreased intellectual functioning, and the information we receive may be interpreted incorrectly and will be forgotten much faster.⁸

7. Be careful what you watch

If I were to tell you a story, I would begin by saying, “It was a pleasant afternoon, when my father and I walked on a green hill under a clear, blue sky.” But, if I were to show you a picture, I wouldn’t have to tell you in 1,000 words what’s in the picture. If I wanted the picture to turn into a movie, I would need at least 25 screenshots within one second or the equivalent of 25,000 words in one second. The information we process through our eyes has both cognitive and emotional components and will be stored in the nerve cells of our brain. This information generates thoughts that either cause our entire body to respond properly

to environmental stressors with a calm demeanor or generates thoughts that react improperly to environmental stimuli.

The thoughts from environmental stressors will bring fear, distress, and anxiety, leading to a physical disturbance of our cells and different body systems. This state of panic is mentioned in the Scriptures, "And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:17, 18).

When a person remains calm and collected during stress, there's a production of positive neuropeptides that activate the expression of good genes. This positive (adaptive) stress response will be transmitted to the person's descendants and even becomes a part of their genetic makeup. But if the individual gets agitated and reacts negatively, that same environmental stimulus will cause the production of different kinds of neuropeptides, activating bad genes. This activation of "bad genes" leads to increased blood pressure and other negative health effects. These individuals will also transmit this type of response to their children since the information from their stress response is stored in their genes.⁸

What a thought-provoking concept! You have the power to affect your children and grandchildren in the next generation through your calm and positive response to stress! But you also have the power to affect them negatively by being anxious and agitated, thus triggering bad genes! The choice is yours!

8. Laugh more

Did you know that laughter can relieve your stress by releasing endorphins, those feel-good chemicals? Short-term benefits of laughter can stimulate many organs—your heart, lungs, and muscles. Laughter can instantly lower your blood pressure and relax your whole body. A good belly laugh exercises the diaphragm and con-

tracts the abdominal muscles. All this stimulation improves circulation and helps with muscle relaxation.

The long-term benefits of laughter include improved immunity, and better heart and cardiovascular health, pain relief, lower stress hormones, and improved mood. This is why the Bible highlights the effectiveness of a cheerful heart and calls it medicine. "A happy heart is good medicine, and a cheerful mind works healing, but a broken spirit dries up the bones. (Proverbs 17:22).

9. Take time to pray

Regular biblical meditation and prayer are crucial to dealing positively with stress. When we pray to God there is a release of anti-stress hormones and neuropeptides in the entire body, as well as neurotransmitters (serotonin and dopamine) which increase pleasure and decrease sadness. Even 10-15 minutes of Christian meditation and prayer have significant positive effects on our mental health. Research from the University of Kentucky shows that students who meditate before a test have significantly higher test scores.¹⁰

Biblical meditation is always directed toward God, our Life-giver and Sustainer, and is connected with Bible study. As we connect with the God of the universe, we will experience peace, security, comfort, as well as positive mental and physical health. "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You" (Isaiah 26:3 NKJV).

Conclusion

As you begin implementing these lifestyle principles today, you will begin enjoying a more-stress free life.

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Herbs and Supplements for Anxiety and Depression

By Gabriel Gherman, PharmD

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression affects more than 280 million people in the world. In the US, depression affects nearly 17 million adults.¹ Even before the pandemic, WHO estimated that 1 in 6 adults experienced some type of mental disorder.

Depression and anxiety are commonly treated with medication, and psychotherapy, accompanied by lifestyle modifications, as well as supplements. The purpose of this article is to emphasize some essential supplements that could be beneficial in the treatment of depression and anxiety. Before stopping any medication and before taking any herbal supplements, be sure to check with your healthcare provider.

• **St John's Wort extract** also known as *hypericum perforatum*, works by increasing the levels of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine and it can be used in cases of mild to moderate depression. A recent meta-analysis (several studies) of over 3000 individuals showed that St John's Wort can improve mild to moderate depression similarly to SSRI drugs such as Prozac and Zoloft, but with fewer side effects. St John's Wort may cause headaches and increase sunburn risk and interfere with other drugs as well.² For this reason, discuss with your healthcare provider if this is an option for you.



• **5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP)** is a chemical that the body makes from tryptophan. 5-HTP then is converted to serotonin, which helps to regulate mood and balance stress levels. Therefore, low brain serotonin levels may contribute to increased anxiety and depression. Tryptophan-rich foods include soybeans, tofu, leafy greens, broccoli, quinoa, flaxseeds, lentils, peanuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, walnuts, peas, oats. A study including 108 trials involving 64 patients concluded that the use of 5-HTP and tryptophan supplementation was better than a placebo at alleviating depression.³

• **Saffron** is an expensive spice that has been shown to improve mood. Individuals were given 30 mg Saffron twice a day in a randomized controlled trial vs. 20 mg Prozac. Within one week Saffron improved the depressed symptoms, and within 8 weeks, patients were significantly better. Both the Saffron and Prozac group were in remission from depression in 8 weeks, but the Prozac group had other unpleasant side effects, while Saffron didn't.⁸ In another study participants reported reduced depression scores and improved social relationships after 8 weeks of using Saffron.⁴

• **Ashwagandha**, also known as *withania somnifera*, is an adaptogen—herbs that help combat stress. Ashwagandha root and leaf extracts exhibited noteworthy anti-stress and anti-anxiety activity in animal and human studies. Ashwagand-



ha has the potential to improve symptoms of depression and insomnia and works by improving communication between the brain and adrenal glands via the nervous system. It also helps to improve GABA and serotonin levels as well. Ashwagandha is tolerated very well, with mild side effects.⁵

- **N-Acetyl Cysteine (NAC)** comes from the amino acid L-cysteine and has many health benefits, one of which could benefit children and adults with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). A double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial was conducted from July 2012 to January 2017. Children ages 8 to 17 years with OCD were assigned to receive NAC (up to 2700 mg/day) for 12 weeks. Compared to the placebo group, OCD symptom severity as measured by the Children's Yale-Brown Obsessive-Compulsive Scale (CY-BOCS), was significantly reduced in the NAC group as compared to placebo. The trial concluded that there may be some initial improvement in OCD symptom severity with NAC treatment. NAC was well tolerated in the study population.⁶

- **Rhodiola** helps to increase energy, mental capacity and reduces the effects of stress and helps manage depression, and anxiety. A trial was done on 80 mildly anxious participants randomized in two different groups of either *Rhodiola rosea* (2 × 200 mg dose Vitano®), or a control (no treatment) over 14 days. Relative to the controls, the experimental group demonstrated a significant reduction in self-reported anxiety, stress, anger, confusion, and depression at 14 days and a significant improvement in total mood.⁷

- **SAM-e** is another herb that helps combat depression naturally by increasing levels of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. A research study was done in 70 hospitals involving 600 patients where they compared giving 800 mg SAM-e twice daily vs. 150 mg of Imipramine (antidepressant drug). The herb SAM-e was equally effective as the drug, but it had minimal side effects. Neil Nedley recommends

200 mg twice daily for best results. Another benefit is that SAM-e acts rapidly, and some patients see improvements within a few weeks.⁸

- **Lavender** has a long history of use for managing symptoms of depression, anxiety, agitation, nervous exhaustion, and insomnia. Lavender has been shown to affect the parasympathetic nervous system which is a network of nerves that helps the body relax after periods of stress and anxiety. One of the main benefits of lavender is that it can calm without sedation. The most effective way to use lavender for anxiety is orally in capsules but also aromatherapy. Some clinical studies show the most effective dose of lavender oil capsules is 80 mg per day. Be sure to use high-quality lavender oil which is not diluted with additives or synthetic substances. Lavender oil can also improve sleep by adding several drops in a warm bath, or a diffuser, or taking it orally in capsules and tinctures. Lavender essential oil is generally recognized as safe by the FDA and can be used topically when diluted in a carrier oil. Excessive intake of lavender oil has been reported to cause nausea and drowsiness.⁹



Before incorporating any supplements, please consult with your doctor or healthcare professional for personalized advice for any mental health conditions.

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THE POWER OF MUSIC FOR THE BRAIN



By Karina Espinal, MT-BC

What would life be like without music? Most people I have asked responded, “Life without music would be dull, depressing, dark, and lifeless.” But what is it about music that makes it so powerful that people can’t live without it?

God designed and created our world with living sound. Birds sing, lions roar, and even whales communicate through special sounds. Even nature has its music . . . the gentle drizzle of rain, the roaring thunder, the splashing waves of the ocean. If we look within our bodies, we see God created us with a perfect, continuous heartbeat that keeps us alive with every pulse.

The purpose of music is endless: connection, emotion, and relationships. Music is a tool used by everyone to simply convey what they are feeling. Music connects our mind with thoughts, our body with rhythm, and our souls with emotion. But not all music is created equal. Some types of music harm our health and emotions, while other types of music can improve our mood, memory, intelligence, and health.

Positive effects of music

Let’s look at the effect of music on our mental health. Music is a torch of light in this world. It has been a mood booster, and a coping mechanism when dealing with depression, stress, anxiety, and other mental

disorders. Music can act as a medium for processing emotions, trauma, and grief. Listening to music or playing an instrument can cause a shift in mood or modify one’s emotional state of mind.

Music can also reduce stress. Studies show that music—especially instrumental music—helps reduce stress in healthy people and those needing medical procedures such as surgeries, dental work, and colonoscopies. “In studies of people with cancer, listening to music combined with standard care reduced anxiety compared to those who received standard care alone”¹ Music, then, functions as an armor by protecting our minds from worrying about things outside of our control.

Have you ever felt excitement or nostalgia when you heard a new song? Do memories come flooding back when you hear a specific song? Listening to music can release dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is a “happy chemical”—a neurotransmitter—that helps us feel pleasure, satisfaction, and motivation. Music can also trigger good or bad memories. “Listening to music can also help people with Alzheimer’s recall seemingly lost memories and even help maintain some mental abilities.”¹

So, when you’re trying to remember something, it’s good to associate it with a song! When you were a child, one of the first things you might have learned is the ABC song. That was so easy because the “repetitive elements of rhythm and melody helped your brain

form patterns that enhance memory”¹ “In a study of stroke survivors, listening to music helped them experience more verbal memory, less confusion, and better-focused attention”¹

Classical music is a genre of music that has inspired people for multiple eras. While many classical composers have orchestrated wonderful pieces for our benefit, composers such as Respighi, Ravel, Bach, and Brahms were some of the composers used in the above study that resulted in positive results.

What is the best music for our mental health?

While there are many genres of music in the world that soothe the soul and can brighten your mood, there is one genre of music that has been very effective in improving mental health. According to Dr. Neil Nedley, “Classical music is most effective, even among those who do not know it or even prefer it.”² A study was done on 14 volunteers, to see what effect classical music had on their mood. Those volunteers who had 6 sessions of music therapy for over 12 weeks, had less fatigue, and depression, lower blood levels of cortisol—a stress hormone—and overall mood improvements. Dr. Nedley recommends “that individuals should listen intently to classical music no less than one hour every two weeks.”³

Negative effects of music

While music has many great benefits for our body and mind, it also has the possibility of being dangerous and deadly. Aristotle once said, “If one listens to the wrong kind of music, he will become the wrong kind of person; but conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music, he will tend to become the right kind of person.”

Hip-Hop music

Music has the possibility of influencing us without us realizing it. A study conducted at the University College Birmingham in the U.K. “suggests that ‘drill’ music, also known as hip-hop music with violent lyrics, can be associated with attention-seeking crime. The researchers also proposed that the prevalence of social media . . . can increase this effect with the larger potential to share this type of music”⁴

Rock music vs. classical music

Rock music can negatively affect one’s learning and memory: “A study reported by the Scripps Howard News Service found that exposure to rock music causes abnormal neuron structures in the region of the brain associated with learning and memory.”⁵ Exposure to hard rock/acid rock music has been shown to inhibit the ability of some people’s brains to store the studied information correctly. Rock music was shown to increase adrenalin levels in a group of students, while a slow piano instrumental had a calming effect”⁵

A study done on 121 high school students concluded that heavy metal music can lead to thoughts of suicide in boys and girls.⁶ While all music enters the brain through the emotional regions, certain kinds of music such as rock can move past the frontal lobe and create a hypnotic effect causing one to lose their ability to reason and have sound judgment. In comparison, classical music can “produce a frontal lobe response that influences the will, moral worth, and reasoning power.”⁷

The danger of rock, heavy metal and rap is that their degrading, sexual, and violent lyrics often conflict with self-control, responsible living, and moral values. “Listening to music with degrading sexual lyrics is related to advances in a range of sexual activities (including sexual intercourse) among adolescents”⁸



The problem is that rock, metal, and rap music negatively affect the frontal lobe of our brain—the seat of spirituality, morality, and the will. This type of music breaks down our “moral” barriers and creates a fantasy world, diverting the mind from reality. Rock beats are created to go against the natural rhythmic cycles in our bodies, ultimately causing nervous tension and a state of alarm.

Figure 1

How Different Genres of Music Affect Lab Mice⁹



- Listening to soft-rock beat music for 8 weeks caused impaired memory.
- Even 3 weeks after the music stopped their memory did not come back.
- Permanent brain damage was visible in mice who listened to soft-rock beats.
- Listening to 3 weeks of classical music had no negative effects.
- Researchers linked rock-like music to shrinkage of the frontal lobe

Health Benefits of Soothing Music¹⁰

- Improved relaxation
- Less need for pain medications during childbirth and cancer therapy
- Lower anxiety
- Improved brain rhythm and function
- Better socialization
- Decreased symptoms in disturbed psychiatric patients

Tips for choosing good music

Music that promotes the highest mental performance follows certain mathematical rules that affect the mind in a calming, encouraging, and safe way. The Baroque genre of music follows this type of organization and set of rules.

Good music achieves a crucial balance between the major elements of **melody**, **harmony**, and **rhythm** which are highlighted in that order. See **Figure 2**.

Figure 2



Melody

The melody should be the most prominent part of the music. The melody should not be static or too repetitive (creating a hypnotic effect), rather with mellow and melodious. It should have a beginning, a climax, and an ending.

Harmony

Harmony is the combination of simultaneous musical notes in a chord. The harmony should support and blend with the melody adding beauty to the composition. As major chords and intervals usually convey pleasure or joy, the minors express deep thought, but may also convey depression and pain.

Rhythm

Rhythm is the energy and heartbeat of music. It's something you can clap to or tap

to. Straight rhythms (march-type rhythms) are ideal, while off-beat and syncopation rhythms might be used sparingly like salt in a meal. Syncopated music that goes against the body's natural rhythm is damaging to one's peak mental performance.

Timbre

Have you ever noticed how you can recognize the voice of a loved one whether they are happy or sad even over the phone? This unique quality of tone color that is distinctive of every individual or musical instrument is called timbre.¹¹

Volume

Research shows that long-term and repeated exposure to high-intensity/low-frequency noise created several health problems such as anxiety, depression, hostility, visual problems, and epilepsy.¹² Being exposed repeatedly to over 85 decibels produced hearing loss. To put it in perspective, a regular conversation is 60 decibels, and a rock concert is close to 140 decibels. Being exposed to High intensity/low-frequency noise like at ball games and some types of music concerts has been linked to poor judgment and confusion.¹²

Lyrics

When choosing music, ask yourself, "Are the words of the music uplifting and ennobling or are they focusing on the negative and depressing side of life?"

Music is a power tool! Music colors the way we think, how we act, and how we see the world. It can even affect our character! It can destroy feelings of gloom and sadness and give us courage and hope, energizing our bodies and calming our minds. So, it is up to us to choose music that is positive and uplifting for our minds, body, and soul. Martin Luther, one of the most prominent figures in the Protestant Reformation, wrote the fa-

mous hymn: "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." Luther said: "Next to the word of God, music is the greatest treasure in the world."

Do you know Who used music as a weapon when people provoked and ridiculed Him? Jesus Christ! "Sorely as He was tried on the point of hasty and angry speech, He never once sinned with His lips. With patient calmness, He met the sneers, the taunts, and the ridicule of His fellow workers at the carpenter's bench. Instead of retorting angrily, He would begin to sing one of David's beautiful psalms; and His companions, before realizing what they were doing, would unite with Him in the hymn. What a transformation would be wrought in this world if men and women today would follow Christ's example in the use of words."¹³

The Bible reminds us of the importance of adding good music to our lives: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19).

Music has changed my life in so many ways that I never thought possible. It has opened doors to friendships, travel, music performances, a love of knowledge, and the motivation to never stop learning about music. Why not choose to listen to good music and experience its brain-boosting, health benefits for yourself?

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By Liliane Balbach, MS, RDN, DipACLM

It is estimated that depression causes an individual to lose an average of 19 workdays per year and 46 days of reduced productivity, costing employers \$17 to \$44 billion a year in lost productivity.¹

A research study, published in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* looked at the effect plant-based diets have on mood productivity. Study participants were GEICO employees at 10 major corporate insurance companies across the country.¹

One group consumed the standard American diet, while the control group followed a whole plant-based diet for 18 weeks. The plant-based group did no calorie counting, no portion control, or carb counting. The cafeteria at work offered daily vegan options (bean burritos, veggie burgers, lentil soup). Both groups were given weekly diet instruction by a registered dietitian.¹

The results showed that those on the plant-based diet had significantly lower feelings of depression, anxiety, and fatigue. They also reported improved emotional well-being and productivity at home and work. Besides, they had an average weight loss of 10 pounds; a 13-point reduction in their LDL (bad) cholesterol, and lower blood sugars.³ We know that plant-based diets can prevent and even reverse heart disease and diabetes, but now we know they also can improve mood!

Why did the plant-based group get such excellent results? A meat-based diet causes inflammation in the body and brain, which leads to depressive symptoms and low levels of serotonin, but a plant-based diet is naturally high in antioxidants and lowers inflammation. Vegetables are also high in B vitamins which have a positive effect on mood.

Bible evidence on the best brain food

In Bible times, at the University of Babylon, the plant-based diet was put to the test by four young Hebrews students. Daniel and

his three friends participated perhaps in the first research study looking at the relationship between diet and mental health. All the students at the university were required to eat the standard Babylonian diet, which included meats and wine. But Daniel and his friends determined not to eat this diet. They requested to continue eating a plant-based diet and drinking water as they had done all their lives.

After three years of study, all the students at the university took their final exam. To the amazement of everyone, the results were astounding! "In all matters of wisdom and understanding that the king enquired of them, he found them [Daniel and his friends] ten times better" (Daniel 1:20). Obedience to the Creator's health laws produces such remarkable results!

As we study the lives of these outstanding young men in the book of Daniel, we learn that they enjoyed superb mental health, shown by their successful professional careers, leadership at the top rank of government, genuine relationships with people, and a personal relationship with God. The diet that the Creator gave to man in the beginning (Genesis 1:29), proved to be the best then, it is the best now, and it will be the best for all eternity (Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:4; Revelation 22:2).

So, jump right in with a plant-based diet! It is the best prescription to boost your mood, productivity, energy, and overall health while reducing your risk for chronic diseases.

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FLAX-NUT SPRINKLE

Ingredients

½ cup flaxseed	¼ cup walnuts
¼ cup chia seeds	2 tablespoons sucanat

Directions:

- Grind flax and chia in a high-speed blender or coffee grinder.
- Grind walnuts in a food processor
- Mix ingredients and refrigerate in airtight container.
- Add to smoothies, cereal, or yogurt.
- 1 tablespoon = 1048 mg Omega-3-fats





RETHINK WHAT YOU THINK

How to Unlearn and Replace Negative Thoughts

By Liliane Balbach,
MS, RDN, DipACLM

A 25-year-old girl named Brittany goes to see a Christian counselor for depression. Two months before her fiancé broke up with her and called off the wedding. Her thoughts are: "Life is awful. It's not worth living. I am a failure. Since I blew it this time, I'll end up an old maid and never be happy." Brittany is thinking negative, untruthful thoughts, and devaluing herself, her situation, and her prospects for the future. She has many misbeliefs.

The truth is that Brittany has many wonderful attributes. She is a diligent worker with a kind heart, and a fun personality. As a special education teacher, she is adored by her students and is well respected at her school. Brittany's family and friends love and appreciate her.

"The worth of a person is not based on success or accomplishment. It is not based on performance or how many people love and respect us. Our worth is based totally and solely on the declaration of God. 'For God so loved the world.' God loves people.

"Our lives hold meaning because God loves us and because we are His. Our lives do not depend upon someone else loving us, staying with us, respecting us . . . If you believe you cannot live without a certain person or that your entire existence depends on somebody, you are setting yourself up to be hurt by that misbelief."¹

Dr. William Backus states: "Our misbeliefs are the direct cause of emotional turmoil, maladaptive behavior, and most so-called mental illness."² If we don't address our misbeliefs, we become victims of events, circumstances, and painful emotions.

Change your thoughts and your feelings

Listen to your thoughts. What is your self-talk? What are you telling yourself about yourself, others, and God? What are your misbeliefs? Are you comparing yourself to others and wishing you had different circumstances?

Our feelings follow our thoughts. When we have untruthful, negative thoughts, they will lead to unpleasant feelings of anxiety, depression, and frustration. But when we think truthful, positive thoughts, these create pleasant and optimistic feelings. Once you identify your misbeliefs and reconstruct them to be truthful, you will be on the path to freedom.

Our thoughts change brain chemistry

Did you know that this negative self-talk that you are telling yourself can affect your brain chemistry? Every time you think a thought, your brain releases hormones.

Figure 1

An electrical transmission goes across your brain, and you become aware of what you're thinking. When you think anxious, angry, or sad thoughts, your brain releases stress neurotransmitters, such as cortisol and adrenaline, which activate your limbic system and make your brain and body feel bad. But when you think positive, hopeful, and happy thoughts, your brain releases neurotransmitters like serotonin, dopamine, and oxytocin, which make you feel good and happy. Remember how wonderful you felt the last time you cuddled a baby, or when someone made a cake just for you?

So, our feelings, passions, and behavior are conditioned by the way we think. This is what the Bible teaches "As a man thinks in his heart [mind], so is he" (Proverbs 23:7, NKJV).

Do you want to be happy? The good news is that changing our misbeliefs and learning to think and speak the truth will make us happier right now. We don't have to wait months and years to start feeling better. Jesus said: "According to your faith be it unto you." If we believe our life is hopeless, then according to our faith it will be so. But if we believe that although life is challenging, it is good, and with Christ's strength, I will be a winner," then according to our faith it will be so.

Emotional intelligence

We all know that IQ, the intelligence quotient measures our intelligence, but there is also an EQ which measures our emotional intelligence. Emotionally intelligent people know and manage their emotions. Recognize emotions in others and achieve their goals. **See Figure 1.**

They think more clearly, communicate more effectively, and live more successful and happy lives. Research shows that people with high EQ are conscientious, dependable, and honest. They are flexible and open to constructive criticism and novel ideas. Would you like to be one of those people?³

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ARE:



- Know your emotions.
- Manage your emotions and don't be managed by them.
- Recognize emotions in others.
- Manage your relationships.
- Motivate yourself to achieve goals.

What controls our emotions?

Our feelings and emotions are controlled mostly by our beliefs, how we evaluate events, the way we think about problems, and our silent self-talk—the messages we give ourselves about life, others, the past, present, and the future. One educator puts it this way: "If the thoughts are wrong, the feelings will be wrong, and the thoughts and feelings combined make up the moral character."⁴ That's a solemn thought: The way we think and feel makes up our character, and our character determines our destiny.

The ABC's of unlearning negative thoughts

A is the activating event, the stressor. B is your belief about the event or stressor and C are the consequences. The reason people think distorted negative thoughts is that they believe they have little or no ability to influence their feelings. They blame situations for the way they feel and act. But the good news is that although we can't do much about the A's (activating events) in our lives, we can change our B's (beliefs) and how they affect our C's (consequences). We can do this by learning to think and speak more accurately and responsibly.

3 Steps to changing your thoughts

- 1) **Listen to your thoughts.** Look for distortions or misbeliefs in your thoughts.
- 2) **Argue against those thoughts.**
- 3) **Replace misbeliefs with the truth.**⁶

ABC'S OF CHANGING THOUGHTS⁵

A	B	C
Activating Event (Unpleasant event)	Belief (Your irrational belief)	Consequences (Negative emotion: anxious, tense, worried)

The Scriptures teach us this method of reconstructing our thoughts: “Casting down imaginations, and everything thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). Practically, this means we are to reject every thought, suggestion, or argument brought by Satan, and make every thought captive, by bringing it into obedience to Jesus Christ. Satan, our enemy, is constantly trying to infuse his lying thoughts into our minds, but God wants us to recognize those crooked thoughts, and replace them with the truth.

10 Negative thinking patterns

1. Mind reading

You assume a person is reacting negatively to you, but have no evidence to support your view.⁷



EXAMPLE:

A friend passes you at the gym and fails to say hello.

MISBELIEF:

“She is ignoring me, so she must not like me anymore.”

TRUTH:

“Although she didn’t greet me; perhaps she had a hard day and work and didn’t notice me.”

2. All-or-nothing thinking

These people think of everything in black-or-white terms. It’s magnificent or awful.⁸



EXAMPLE:

Jonathan recently got the courage to ask Susan out on a date. He left her a voicemail. A few days later, he still didn’t hear from her.

MISBELIEF:

“I am a total loser. No one wants to go out with me. I will never find a girl to marry me. So why bother?”

TRUTH:

“Maybe Susan didn’t get my message or is out of town. Even if she decided to ignore my message, I am still a worthwhile person.”

3. Mental Filter

People who look through a mental filter focus on one negative detail instead of looking at the whole picture.⁸



EXAMPLE:

Your coworker made a mistake, which caused you to miss a deadline. He apologized, but you still focus on the mistake despite all the times he has helped you.

MISBELIEF:

“I’m really upset. It’s all Robert’s fault that I missed my deadline for this project.”

TRUTH:

“It’s too bad I missed my deadline, but Robert apologized, and he helped me several times in the past.”

4. Magnification or minimization

When we evaluate ourselves, another person, or a situation by magnifying the negative or minimizing the positive.⁹



EXAMPLE:

Kim rehearsed the speech for her high school graduation. When it came time to give her speech, she blundered on a couple of words. She ended up giving a heart-felt speech and many people complimented her.

MISBELIEF:

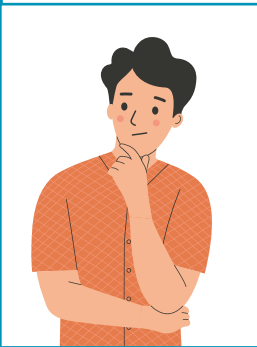
"I am so embarrassed by my trip up. I feel that I've ruined the graduation."

TRUTH:

"I made a few mistakes, but most people enjoyed my speech."

5. Emotional Reasoning

You believe that what they feel must be the way things are. Feelings can be misleading.¹⁰



EXAMPLE:

Mary moved to a new city and had trouble making friends. She felt lonely but gave up on going out to meet new people.

MISBELIEF:

"I feel lonely and helpless. I can't meet new people."

TRUTH:

"Although I feel lonely, I will ask my coworkers if they want to go out for dinner sometime. I will look for a gym and sign up for exercise classes."

6. Personalization

Blaming yourself completely for bad outcomes just because you had a small role to play in them.¹¹



EXAMPLE:

Johnny, a sixth grader comes home with D's and F's on his report card.

MISBELIEF:

Mother says: "I am a failure as a parent."

TRUTH:

"I am unhappy with my son's report card, but I will help him to get a tutor, and see how the teacher can help."

7. Mislabeled

You label yourself as a failure when you make the smallest mistake, instead of describing the error you made. This can lead to low self-worth, increased angry feelings, and verbal and physical hostility.¹¹



EXAMPLE:

Susan cheated on her diet. She thinks:

MISBELIEF:

"What a fat pig I am!"

TRUTH:

"Although I cheated on my diet, I am still a valuable person. I will continue making healthy food choices and exercising daily."

8. Overgeneralization

You assume that bad events will happen again and again for the rest of your life. You generalize from a few instances. Watch out for the words “always” and “never.”¹⁴



EXAMPLE:

John was fired from his job once. Now he relives the trauma every time his boss wants to see him.

MISBELIEF:

“I lost my job before. I will probably lose this one also.”

TRUTH:

“I am doing my best on this job and my boss told me that he likes my work. He probably wants to tell me about the new project.”

9. Discounting the positive

When someone points out the positive, you discount it and insist it “doesn’t count.”¹⁵



EXAMPLE:

David received a plaque and a gift certificate for his contributions to his company. He hid the plaque in the drawer and never mentioned it to family and friends.

MISBELIEF:

“I don’t feel like I had done anything special to deserve it.”

TRUTH:

“I am so thankful they thought of me. I really appreciate the gift and the plaque they gave me.”

10. Fortune teller error

When we assume that we know what will happen in the future, based on little or no evidence. We imagine the worst.¹⁶



EXAMPLE:

“I am getting bad grades in Calculus.

MISBELIEF:

I know I will fail Calculus this semester and then I won’t get into”

TRUTH:

“Calculus is a tough class, but I will get a tutor and put my best effort into doing homework and studying. I believe I can pass the class.

WHEN YOU CATCH YOURSELF THINKING NEGATIVE, DISTORTED THOUGHTS, ALWAYS ASK YOURSELF:

- Is it true?
- Is it honest?
- Is it just?
- Is it pure?
- Is it lovely?
- Is it a good report?
- Is it virtuous?
- Is it praiseworthy?
- **If it is, then think about these things!**

POSITIVE THOUGHTS EXERCISE

Take a piece of paper and fold it in half. On one side write the negative thought you are trying to challenge. On the other side, write as many positive thoughts as possible to dispel that negative thought.

This exercise can help you find replacements for your most common negative thoughts.



Test your thoughts

Our mind was created by God to think truthful thoughts, but after man sinned, the enemy has been trying to implant distorted, crooked thoughts into our minds, and often we have allowed him to do it. If we aren't sure if a specific thought is truthful or distorted, we need to apply this test from the Scriptures: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

Be transformed

Thank God that those feelings of anxiety and depression won't last. We have the power to accept or reject those negative thoughts that enter our minds. When we catch a crooked, untruthful thought, we need to rephrase it and make it truthful. This is what God wants us to do: "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2). Day after day, as we surrender our crooked thoughts to God, and ask Him to help us straighten them, new neural pathways will develop, our brain chemistry will change, and we will experience true joy, peace, contentment, and vibrant mental health.

"You shall know the truth, and the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

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9. *Ibid.*, 138.
10. *Ibid.*
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12. *Ibid.*, 137.
13. *Ibid.*, 138



*A good book on cognitive behavior therapy from a Christian perspective is: *Telling Yourself the Truth* by William Backus and Marie Chapian. Bethany House Publishers, 2000.

FORGIVE TO LIVE



By David Zic

We've all been hurt by the words or actions of another person. Whether it's a simple argument with your spouse or a long-time resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved lack of forgiveness can go deeper than you may realize. It may negatively affect your physical, mental, and spiritual health. Feelings of anger, bitterness, resentment, and hostility are associated with several diseases. Studies have found that people who are genuinely forgiving have great health benefits including lower risk of a heart attack, lower blood cholesterol, reduced pain, stress, lower blood pressure, anxiety, depression, and stress.¹

Forgiveness is not just about saying, "I forgive you." Dr. Karen Swartz, MD, Director of the Mood Disorders Clinic at The Johns Hopkins Hospital states: Forgiveness "is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings whether the person deserves it or not."¹

Forgiveness is rooted in the very nature of Christianity. Hanging in agony on the cross, the first words the Redeemer of the world utters are "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Are you thinking, "How can I


experience forgiveness such as this and at the same time forgive those who have hurt me? Why should I forgive? How can I forgive when the hurts are so deep, and the wounds remain with me?

There is a reason that forgiveness and its derivatives are mentioned over 60 times in the Scriptures. We desperately need this. We need it for ourselves, and for those around us. Then they can have a glimpse of the forgiveness God desires them to experience. Understanding forgiveness will help us to experience the peace that God has promised us. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Steps to Experience Forgiveness

Step 1: Recognize that forgiveness is a divine action

As a pastoral counselor I have worked with many who have been hurt and are trying with all their might to move past the pain that has been caused to them. One of the biggest challenges they face is knowing that they must forgive the one who has hurt them. From my experience I have learned that we always fail when we try to forgive, because forgiveness is not a human characteristic; it is divine.



Let's be clear, forgiveness is a divine action. When you have been hurt, don't rush to the person who has hurt you to show them that you forgave them. It will either end in you being hurt again, or you are making the situation worse. Time is needed for you to go away from the situation of hurt and focus on your own relationship with God. Consider your own spiritual condition without the person who has just hurt you. As you ask the Lord to forgive you for your own sins, His Spirit takes possession of your thoughts, and you are led to the foot of the cross.

"The light shining from the cross reveals the love of God. His love is drawing us to Himself. If we do not resist this drawing, we shall be led to the foot of the cross in repentance for the sins that have crucified the Saviour."²

There at the foot of the cross, you will recognize that if you are to forgive the one who has hurt you, it will only be by the power of God's grace in your own life. With such a powerful grace, seeking His pardon, you will reach out in His Spirit to the one who has hurt you and forgive them. "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). They will experience God's grace through you.

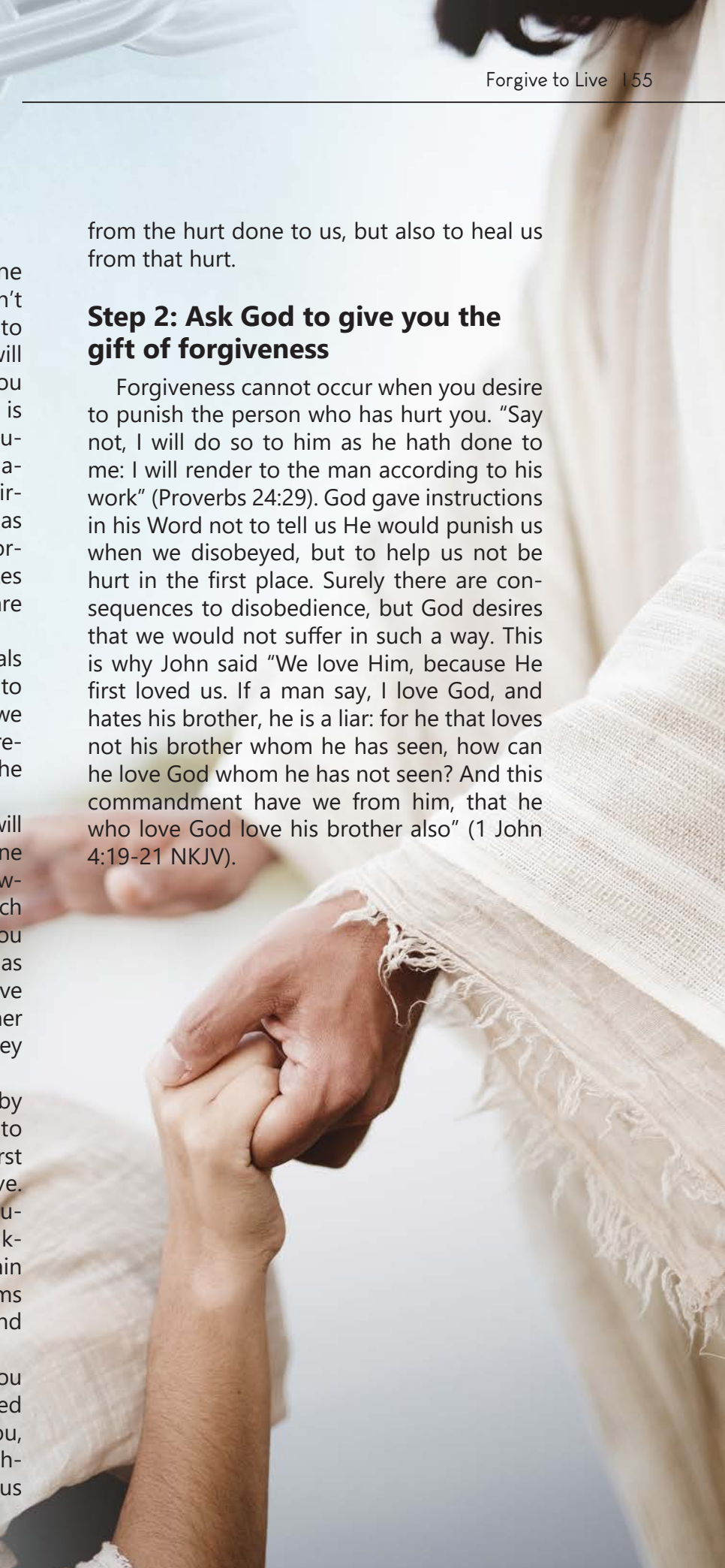
Many have tried to forgive others by themselves, but God knows our inability to do this, and He asks us to come to Him first to receive the power to be able to forgive. "To err is human; to forgive, divine."² A human being can forgive on their own, thinking they want to move on from the pain done to them, but the hurt always seems to remain. Forgiveness without healing and transformation is not God's plan.

In the process of true forgiveness, you will never be alone. Recognizing your need to heal from the hurt that was done to you, our Heavenly Father never leaves us without His presence. He wants to move us

from the hurt done to us, but also to heal us from that hurt.

Step 2: Ask God to give you the gift of forgiveness

Forgiveness cannot occur when you desire to punish the person who has hurt you. "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work" (Proverbs 24:29). God gave instructions in his Word not to tell us He would punish us when we disobeyed, but to help us not be hurt in the first place. Surely there are consequences to disobedience, but God desires that we would not suffer in such a way. This is why John said "We love Him, because He first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who love God love his brother also" (1 John 4:19-21 NKJV).



Forgiveness cannot be achieved if you wish the other person to be hurt as they've hurt you. "See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men." Allow God's grace from step one to wash away any desire you may have for this person to be hurt. "Do not say, I will [a] recompense evil; wait for the Lord, and He will save you" (Proverbs 20:22 NKJV).

Step 3: Forgive without waiting to be asked

The next thing to remember is that once you have committed this experience of hurt and pain to the Lord, you need to forgive even before the person comes and asks for forgiveness. Those who hurt others have shown by their action that they are not imbued with the Spirit of the Lord. They may never have a conviction that they have erred. In this case, even through the pain and hurt, it may be that the Lord is using this experience for you to share with them that they are forgiven so that their own conscience may be stirred. "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. (Luke 17:3 NKJV). In forgiving them you have released their power over you to hurt you, now you can help them so that this situation will not be repeated.

At this point the natural question would be, but what about the person who keeps on hurting me? Imagine what would happen if the Lord rejected us the first time we sinned? What if the Lord said, "one and done?" He continues to forgive, for it is in His nature to forgive. He asks us to do the same. In the same instruction of Jesus just quoted, the Lord continues: "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:4 NKJV). No wonder step one comes first. To continue forgiving is definitely not a human characteristic, but a divine one.

Seven times! Forgive seven times! Of course, if someone hurts me, I forgive according to step one by His grace, but I

do not seek them out to hurt me again. I would separate myself from that situation of hurt as much as possible. They may be forgiven by me and even by God, but the consequences of sin remain with them. By forgiving I have released their power over me, but what if they keep seeking me out to hurt me? Seven times! That seems too much. And remember seven times "in a day!"

According to this teaching of Jesus I would need to forgive someone if they hurt me every three hours a day! Peter and the other disciples believed that Jesus had gone too far in that declaration. Who could do that? As soon as Peter gets an opportunity, he asks Jesus to correct His statement in front of the other disciples. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" (Matthew 18:21). "Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." (Matthew 18:22 NKJV).

Seven times a day was about every three hours. Seventy times seven is 490, meaning that if someone hurts you 490 times a day you would need to forgive them! With 1440 minutes in a day that would mean if someone hurt you every three minutes of the day you would need to forgive them. When Jesus had said seven times a day, the disciples had replied "increase our faith" (Luke 17:5) because it seemed impossible. How much more is it to forgive someone 490 times a day. Basically, then we can say that Lord is instructing us to always forgive.

Step 4: Experience the benefits of forgiveness

As you forgive the person who hurt you, they may or may not be pricked in their conscience to seek their own transformation with the Lord, but you will begin to experience the benefits of forgiveness in either case. God's forgiveness of your own sins will be revealed to you. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." (Mark 11:25 NKJV).

**“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you”
(Ephesians 4:32).**

The release of pain is an immediate result of forgiveness. “When you don’t forgive someone, in some way that person is in jail, and you are the warden. You’re incarcerated, too, because you have to make sure the prisoner stays there. The longer you do not forgive the more stress you build up over the situation.”³ Then it would be better to know that “forgiveness is the economy of the heart . . . forgiveness saves the expense of anger, the cost of hatred, the waste of spirit.”⁴

As stated in the beginning, there are great health benefits associated with a spirit of genuine forgiveness! Do you want to lower your blood pressure? Practice forgiveness!⁵ Would you like to improve your gut health?⁶ Practice forgiveness! Men who want to improve their prostate health,⁷ need to practice forgiveness. These are just a few examples of the health benefits associated with forgiveness.

A 2005 study published in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* found that participants who considered themselves more forgiving had better health across five measures: physical symptoms, the number of medications used, sleep quality, fatigue, and medical complaints. The study authors found that this was because the process of forgiveness tamped down negative emotions and stress. The conclusion of the study was that “the victim relinquishes ideas of revenge, and feels less hostile, angry, or upset about the experience.”⁸

Conclusion

Are you wondering why some people forgive unconditionally and right away while others wait until the person who has hurt them has contrition? An amazing study was done on 784 older individuals to find out that very point. The results were astounding. Those people who felt that they are forgiven by God were 2.5 times more likely to feel that

transgressors should be forgiven unconditionally than people who don’t feel they are forgiven by God.

God’s word taught us this principle thousands of years ago: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).

“Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God’s pardoning grace. In God’s forgiveness the heart of the erring one is drawn close to the great heart of Infinite Love. The tide of divine compassion flows into the sinner’s soul, and from him to the souls of others.”⁹

Maybe you are hurting because someone has hurt you and still has power over you because you have not forgiven them. You may think, “This is not for me.” If you are, seek out a Biblical counselor who will help you through this experience. God desires you to experience the same mental, physical, and spiritual benefits of forgiveness that His children have had in the past and continue to have today.

“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea” (Micah 7:18-19 NKJV).

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BY HIS STRIPES

By Marco Alonso

How valuable would a coach and mentor be to you? Someone—who you know for a fact—understands what you go through and can provide guidance. Someone who is there at your darkest moments when it matters the most. Misery loves company. And as much as you hate to admit it, it's comforting to have someone who shares or has experienced your pain. There's no scrutiny, but rather an understanding companionship and abiding presence. But what if company is what your misery needs? What if company was the key to your healing? Let's take a look at how the life of Jesus Christ can be the companionship and understanding you need to experience more vibrant mental health.

The Despised God

Sometimes when you look at your life and circumstances, you might feel that God is incapable of understanding what you go through. But let's look at Matthew chapter 1 where we have Jesus Christ's family tree. At first, nothing is outstanding about it, but when you look closer, you will begin to see generational mistakes, trauma, and serious crimes. Take, for example, King David. After a lifetime of devotion to God, he ends up committing adultery with his best soldier's wife and then sends him to the frontline of the battle to be killed—thus covering up his tracks. Every imaginable situation is found in Jesus' family tree. He was also born into a blended family where his stepbrothers often mistreated Him. And that's why David writes in the Psalms, *"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure"* (Psalms 147:5).

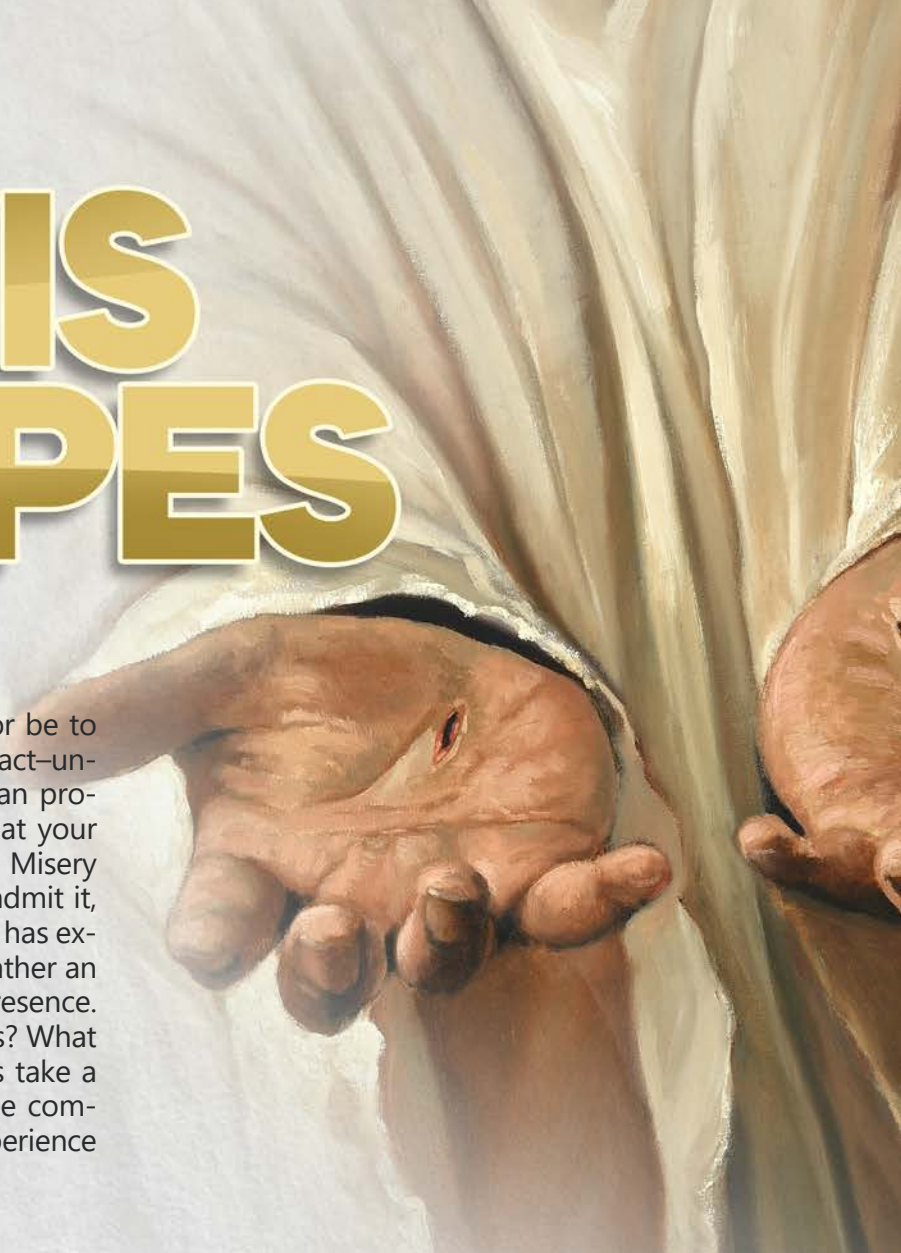
In Isaiah 53 we have a vivid prediction of how the life of Jesus would be. The first descriptive words in verse 3 are: "He is despised." In John 1:46 Nathanael—Christ's future disciple—asks Philip, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Nazareth, an insignificant farming village, nestled in the mountains, away from the main trade routes, was the last place anyone would expect to find the coming Messiah. Nazareth had no formal schools. So, if you wanted to learn the prophecies and the Torah, you'd have to go to the rabbinical school. Unfortunately, a village like Nazareth was considered cursed by God. "In the days of Christ, the town or city that did not provide for the religious instruction of the young was regarded as under the curse of God."¹

The beginning of Jesus' mission was already marked by biases. And even if His prospective supporters and followers were attracted to His mission, they would still look down on Him because of His hometown.

The Grieving God

Jesus had spent His life in unreserved service to everyone He met. It seemed that healing the sick



was a never-ending mission. Crowds would gather around Him for healing, for they had heard that He was the answer to their pain. (Matthew 14:4) But as much as He sympathized and longed to heal them, there was something He could not do. He would never force healing on them if they didn't want it.

One day Jesus meets a man who has been paralyzed for 38 years. This man was near a pool where it was believed that an angel would come down and stir the water. And whoever made it first into the pool, would be healed. As Jesus approached him, He asked, "Do you want to be made whole?" (John 5:6). Healing was possible. The only thing standing between the man's paralysis and his healing was whether he wanted to be healed.

"The sick man answered Him, Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up." Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed, and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. Notice that as soon as the paralytic was willing to be healed, Christ supplied the power. So, it is with you and me; we can bring our needs, worries, and anxieties to Jesus. We can ask Him to give us the power to follow the lifestyle blueprint for vibrant health, and He will restore us.

One of the most iconic moments in Jesus' ministry occurred with He was on the way to Jerusalem for the Passover, a few days before His crucifixion. He stopped on a hill and gazed at the capital city of His people. He began to weep: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often I wanted to **gather your** children together, **as a hen gathers** her chicks under her wings, but **you were not willing!**" (Matthew 23:37-39).

There was nothing more painful than seeing those He loved suffering. And suffering needlessly because He was their solution! But amidst their suffering, He was suffering right beside them. Never forget this promise: "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9) So remember, each time you are suffering, Christ is suffering with you.

The Abandoned God

The time had come for Jesus to go to the cross. Think about it. The anticipation of pain is the worst thing. I remember—about 10 years ago—a very close friend whom I considered family, was months from dying. The nurse came twice a week and would update us on her condition. This was excruciating. The fact that I knew was beyond what I could bear. Try to imagine how it was for Jesus. The reality is we may never fully understand, but we can see the love God has for us. Just look at the love!

At this moment, Jesus was struggling with human desires we all know too well: trying to avoid pain and grasping onto life to survive. It was night and while His best friends, Peter, James, and John slept, Jesus' body and emotions were at war. "If it's possible . . . Father take this cup from me," He groaned. Although countless times, Jesus would spend entire nights in prayer for His disciples, at this moment, He longed for His closest disciples to pray for Him. Just this once. All Jesus needed at this time was a hug, words of comfort, and support: "Thank You for what You will do for us; we are praying for You."

Christ's feeling of abandonment was not limited to His family and His closest disciples; He felt abandoned by His Father as well. The psychological pain that the Son of Man experienced at this moment was so intense that He began to bleed from His pores.

"As Christ felt His unity with the Father broken up, He feared that in His human nature, He would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the powers of darkness."² His body was so weak that an angel from heaven came to strengthen Him. (Luke 22:43) The angel encouraged Jesus to drink the bitter cup and go to Calvary. It was because his nearest friends failed Him, that an angel had to come to strengthen Jesus.

This feeling of abandonment and the weight of my sins and that of the whole world were too heavy to bear causing Jesus to agonize in prayer, "'O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.'" Three times has He uttered that prayer."³

As the world's Redeemer prays to His Father the third time, He sees what would happen if humanity were left without a Savior. "He sees that the transgressors of the law if left themselves, must perish. He sees the helplessness of man. He sees the power of sin." He sees your pain across time—and what would happen if He did not offer Himself as a sacrifice? He sees your helplessness and decides it will all be worth it if you could be with Him forever. "The woes and lamentations of a doomed world rise before Him. He beholds its impending fate, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself."³

The Rejected God

In Matthew 27, after struggling alone in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is greeted by Judas. As a signal to the crowd, Judas betrays Jesus with a kiss. And although Jesus was aware of this betrayal, Jesus' words to Judas are packed with

emotion, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). This was as if He were saying, "Do you betray me with the most humanly intimate form of affection?" For about three years Judas had been with Jesus. He witnessed His life of continuous self-sacrifice and perfect love, and at times He was touched, but He never made a complete surrender to Christ. Jesus was betrayed by Peter, one of His closest disciples. And yet you would expect that His strongest supporters would be His family, but they too were doubtful of His earthly mission. "For neither did his brethren believe in him" (John 7:5). If you have family that does not understand you or support you in times of difficulty, remember you are not alone.

The Wounded God

Now it was time for the trial. The Jewish priests and rulers had racked up a series of charges against Christ, and the trial that He was about to have was a farce. Witnesses had been paid and subpoenaed to testify against Him. Isaiah 53 depicts how this would play out and suggests that Jesus' physical trauma would come to the point where He would be beaten beyond recognition.

Countless films have attempted to depict Jesus' pain. But all pale in comparison when we're able to see that His pain was greater because it was caused by those whom He loved. It was caused by you and me. My sins and your sins caused God's pain.

As He's being held on trial, the Jews handed Him over to the Romans. The oppressive power they loathed, suddenly became their ally.

"They cried out, 'Away with him, away with him, crucify him! Pilate said to them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, we have no king but Caesar'" (John 19:15). The Jews did not stop there. In John 19, they go on to Pilate and let him know that if he sided with Jesus—who claimed to be the king of the Jews—he would be guilty of treason. "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12).

"And one will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your ^[a]arms?' Then he will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.'" (Zechariah 13:6).

It is Finished

Pressured by the mob, Pilate decides to allow Jesus to suffer the penalty for treason. Pilate then washes his hands. The Jews finally get what they wanted. Jesus was now going to be directed to Calvary.

By this time Jesus had not only experienced the emotional turmoil at Gethsemane but also the degrading insults and blatant lies of the hired witnesses, capable of stripping any man's dignity. And after the beatings which had left him nearly unrecognizable, Jesus was now with a crown of thorns on His head, He was ordered to carry His cross. This was beyond what any human could physically endure. Jesus had not eaten since Thursday evening. He was hungry. His disciples had abandoned him. And as He is trying to carry the cross alone, He collapses. It was physically impossible to carry the cross. So, Simon of Cyrene was asked to carry it for Him.

Jesus was placed on the cross. As He is hanging on the cross, He is still unable to feel His Father's presence. Throughout Christ's life on earth, His Father was the source of encouragement, companionship, guidance, and hope. But now, He felt so distant, desperately distant. And in a moment of terrifying misery, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying. . . "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Every single time I try to understand how God could come down and become one of us so we could be healed is beyond my understanding. It simply does not make sense to our limited minds how much really God loves you and me. But every time, I am reminded of John's words, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1).

By His Stripes

When it doesn't make sense why you are going through difficulties, just look at the nature of God's love. When your pain and anxiety don't make sense, just look at the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for you. When your feelings of abandonment seem unbearable, gaze at His agonizing experience for you. When you feel you are not enough, view the cross and remember that you mean the world to Jesus. Remember that Jesus Christ would have gone to the cross if you were the only person who needed to be saved.

I know that at times your pain and unspoken struggles will be unbearable. And that's because they are. While Jesus was carrying the cross, He could not bear it anymore. Someone had to step in and help. So, when you find yourself struggling, look to Jesus and follow Him. Trust the process. Ask Him to help and He will. He's been there and He has been victorious.

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3. *Ibid.*, 690.



MOOD BOOSTING RECIPES

Baked Tofu I By Rose Duarte Nunes

Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped
4 tomatoes, cubed
parsley to taste
3 Tablespoons olive oil

1/2 cups Bragg's Liquid Aminos or soy sauce
2 blocks of Firm or Extra Firm Tofu, drained

Assemble the Ingredients:

1. Place chopped onions and tomatoes in a bowl.
2. Chop and add the parsley, Bragg's amino's and olive oil.
3. Cut the tofu into strips, add to the other ingredients, and mix well.
4. Bake at 350°F-380°F for about 50 minutes or until golden. From time to time mix during baking, so you get it evenly baked. Enjoy.



Black-Eyed Peas & Greens I

Ingredients:

1 tablespoons olive oil or vegetable broth
1 medium onion, diced
1 medium red bell pepper, diced

3 cloves garlic, minced
1 ¼ cups dry black-eyed peas
3 ½ cups vegetable broth

2 bay leaves
2 teaspoons smoked paprika
1/4 tsp cayenne pepper

2 tablespoons coconut aminos or soy sauce
1/2 teaspoon sea salt bite-sized pieces

Directions:

1. Soak black eyed peas overnight, then drain and set aside.
2. Heat a large pot over medium heat. Sauté onion in oil or broth for 4-5 minutes, until onion is translucent.
3. Add bell pepper and minced garlic and sauté for one more minute or until tender.
4. Add black-eyed peas and rest of ingredients except collard greens. Add 1/2 cup of vegetable broth. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
5. Reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook for 30 minutes or until the beans are a la dente.
6. Wash collard greens; remove stems; chop leaves. Add them to the soup. Continue cooking for 20-30 minutes, until the peas are tender, and the greens are wilted.
7. Remove bay leaves. Taste and adjust seasonings as needed.
8. Serve with cornbread, or over rice..



Edamame Beet Salad I By Heidi Silva

Ingredients:

- 5 medium sized raw beets
- 4 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 teaspoon Himalayan Pink Salt
- 1 tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive oil
- 2 tablespoons fresh, chopped dill
- 1/4 cup finely diced red onions
- 3/4 cup finely diced raw or roasted red bell pepper
- 1 cup edamame, steamed and cooled
- 1/2 cup sliced kalamata olives or olives of your choice

Directions:

1. Wash, peel, and cube the beets. Place in a saucepan with water and steam until tender. Drain and set aside to cool while you prepare the rest of the ingredients.
2. Whisk together the lemon juice, salt, oil, and fresh dill in a bowl. Adjust salt and lemon juice to your taste. Add in the rest of the ingredients and mix well.
3. Serve chilled. Enjoy alongside a green tossed salad, whole wheat pita bread, and Vegan Baked Falafel drizzled with Tahini Sauce.



Tahini Sauce I By Heidi Silva

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup tahini
- Zest and juice of 1 small y lemon
- Himalayan Pink Salt to taste
- 2 garlic cloves, pressed
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
- Pinch of cayenne (optional)
- 1/3 cup water

Directions:

1. In a small food processor, combine all the ingredients and blend well. Or whisk the ingredients together by hand in a small bowl.
2. Note that you'll need to chop the fresh herbs and zest more finely than you would if you were using a food processor.
3. Store in a glass jar in the refrigerator.

Baked Falafel I By Heidi Silva

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup + 1 Tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup raw uncooked chickpeas
- 1/2 cup roughly chopped onion
- 1/2 cup packed fresh parsley
- 1/2 cup packed fresh cilantro
- 6 cloves garlic, quartered
- 1 tsp fine Himalayan Pink salt
- 1/2 tsp ground cumin
- 1/4 tsp ground coriander

Directions:

1. Rinse raw chickpeas and let it soak for 24 hours in the fridge.
2. In a food processor, combine the soaked, drained chickpeas, onion, parsley, cilantro, garlic, salt, cumin, coriander, and the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Process until smooth ~ 1 minute.
3. Scoop out about 2 tablespoons of the mixture at a time. Shape the falafel into small patties (~2 inches wide and ½ inch thick). Place falafel on the oiled pan.
4. Preheat oven to 375• F. Spread 1 ½ tablespoons of olive oil into a large, rimmed baking sheet.
5. Bake in the middle rack for 25 to 30 minutes. Carefully flip the falafels halfway through baking, until they are deeply golden on both sides.
6. Falafels taste much better if eaten the next day. Reheat in the oven or in an air-fryer for 15-20 minutes. They also freeze well.



Creamy Vegan Asparagus Soup I By Mary Lupulesku

Ingredients:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 ½ cups cashews, soaked in hot boiling water | 4-6 garlic cloves |
| 2 pounds asparagus | 1 tablespoon Mrs. Dash (Yellow Cap) |
| 2 onions | 2 tablespoons chicken-style seasoning or 2 vegan "Not Chick'n" bouillon cubes |
| 2 medium carrots | Salt to taste |
| 2 large potatoes | |



Directions:

1. Soak the cashews in hot boiling water while you cook vegetables.
2. Break the stems of the asparagus. Cut off the tips and steam them. Add them to the soup when done.
3. Peel potatoes, onions, and carrots and cut them into big pieces. Cut the asparagus spears. Add all the veggies to a pot with 2 quarts of water. Cook until tender.
4. Let the veggie soup cool while you prepare the ROUX.
5. When the soup is cooled a little, use an immersion blender and cream the soup in the same pot. Or use a regular blender, filled about ¾, and blend well.
6. To make the ROUX: In a frying pan, toast 2 tablespoons of white flour without oil, mixing constantly.
7. When the flour is golden brown, take the pan off the stove and put it in the sink. Add
8. 2-3 cups of soy milk. Mix quickly with a whisk to create a smooth mixture.
9. Immediately add the ROUX to the creamed soup and bring it to a boil. Cook the soup on low for 2-3 minutes.
10. Blend the soaked cashews into a cream with 1 cup water. Add the cashew cream to the soup and cook for a minute. As salt if needed.
11. Adjust the soup to the thickness you like by adding more water. The soup will thicken when it cools down.
12. Serve with whole grain bread and tofu or avocado spread. Enjoy!

Lemon Garlic Kale I By ???

Ingredients:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil | 1/2 cup vegetable stock or water, or more as needed |
| 3 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced | 1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt or more to taste |
| Pinch red pepper flakes | ½ lemon |
| 1 large bunch kale (7 to 8 cups chopped leaves) | |

Directions:

1. Rinse the kale and pull the leaves from the stems. Discard the stems or save to add to homemade stock another day. Coarsely chop kale leaves into pieces, about 2 inches large.
2. Heat the olive oil in a wide skillet over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring often, until the garlic is soft, but before it browns.
3. Add the chopped kale leaves, stock, and salt. Cook, tossing the kale around the pan occasionally, until the kale turns bright green, is soft and is wilted ~ 7 to 8 minutes. If the liquid evaporates before the kale is tender, add a little bit more to the pan.
4. Taste and adjust with additional salt. Stir in the juice from half a lemon.
5. Makes 4 servings. Enjoy!



Middle Eastern Lentils | By Liliane Balbach

Ingredients:

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 1 cup dried lentils | 3 garlic cloves, pressed | ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley | 2 cups coarsely chopped fresh spinach (optional) |
| 5 cups vegetables stock or water | ¼ teaspoon cayenne | 2 cups chopped tomatoes | |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil | 2 bay leaves | ¼ cup tomato paste | |
| 2 cups chopped onions | ½ cup raw bulghur | Pinch of dried rosemary | |

Directions:

1. Rinse the lentils and put in the pot with stock or water. Bring them to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 40 minutes.
2. Sauté onions, garlic until translucent. Add the cayenne, bay leaves and raw bulghur. Stir until onions and bulghur are lightly browned.
3. Mix in parsley and tomatoes. When tomatoes are soft, stir in tomato paste.
4. Add the onion/bulghur mixture into the soup pot and simmer for 15 minutes. Add rosemary and salt.
5. Just before serving, stir in the fresh spinach and let it wilt. Garnish with fresh parsley.

Sunflower Seed Burgers | By Sandra DeSouza

Ingredients:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1 cup mashed tofu | 2 cloves garlic |
| 2 cups grated carrots | 1 tsp. Italian seasoning |
| 1 cup walnuts | 1 cup breadcrumbs |
| 1 cup water | 1 large onion, finely chopped |
| ½ cup whole wheat flour or spelt flour | Salt to taste |
| 2 cups sunflower seeds | |

Directions:

1. Process walnuts and sunflower seeds in food processor until fine.
2. Combine all the other ingredients. Shape into burgers
3. Coat each burger in breadcrumbs.
4. Bake at 350 F (180 C) for 20 minutes. Turn them over and bake till golden brown.



Sweet Endlings

Walnut Sweet Spread I By Sandra Desouza

Ingredients:

- 1 cup water
- 1 cup walnuts
- 1/2 cup dates
- 1/4 cup Prunes

Directions:

1. Soften dates and prunes in water.
2. Place all ingredients in a food processor blender and whiz until smooth.
3. Yield: 1-1/2 cups. Keep it refrigerated.



Omega-3 Bars I By Sandra Desouza

Ingredients:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 1/2 cup rolled oats | 1/4 cup ground flaxseeds |
| 1 cup pitted dates | 1/2 tsp. cinnamon ground |
| 1 cup desiccated coconut | 1/2 tsp. salt |
| 1/4 cup sunflower seeds | 4 tablespoons water |
| 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds | |

Assemble the Salad:

1. Place all the ingredients in the food processor and process.
2. Transfer mixture in a small tray lined with parchment paper.
3. Set well forming a block. Allow to set well in the refrigerator for 1 hour.
4. Unmold and cut into pieces. Keep it refrigerated.



Carob Snickers Balls I By Susan Lausevic

Ingredients:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 cup old fashioned oats | 1/2 cup carob chips | 1 Tablespoon warm water |
| 1/2 cup natural peanut butter | 1 Tablespoon chia seeds | 1 teaspoon vanilla |
| 1/2 cup ground flax seeds | 1/3 cup honey or maple syrup | |

Directions:

1. Stir the liquids together and pour over dry ingredients.
2. Mix well and roll into small balls.
3. Optional – can be rolled in coconut.
4. Refrigerate or freeze.



Chia Pudding I

By Sandra Desouza

Ingredients:

400ml coconut cream
1/2 cup plant based milk
1/4 cup Maple syrup

1 teaspoon Vanilla extract
1 lemon, zest and juice
1/2 cup chia seeds

Directions:

1. In a bowl, whisk to combine coconut cream, almond milk, lemon, vanilla extract. Pour over chia seeds and stir well.
2. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.



Breakfast

Vegan Homemade Granola I

By Emma Tudoroiu

Ingredients:

4 cups old-fashioned rolled oats
1 1/2 cup raw nuts and/or seeds (1 cup pecans and 1/2 cup pepitas)
1/3 olive oil
1/2 cup maple syrup or honey

1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/3 cup dried fruit, chopped, if large
1 teaspoon fine-grain sea salt or 3/4 teaspoon regular salt
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350• F
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the oats, nuts and/or seeds, salt and cinnamon. Stir to blend.
3. In another bowl mix the oil, maple syrup and/or honey and vanilla. Pour on oat mixture. Mix well, until every oat and nut is lightly coated. Pour the granola onto your large cookie sheet. Use a large spoon to spread it in an even layer.
4. Bake until lightly golden, about 30 minutes, stirring halfway. For extra-clumpy granola, press the stirred granola down with your spatula to create a more even layer. The granola will further crisp up as it cools.
5. Let the granola cool completely for at least 45 minutes). Top with the dried fruit.
6. Store the granola in an airtight container at room temperature for several weeks., or in a sealed freezer bag in the freezer for up to 3 months.



Quick Tofu Spread I

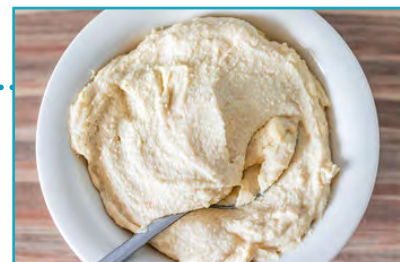
By Mary Lupulesku

Ingredients:

1-pound organic extra firm tofu
4 tablespoons of nutritional yeast flakes
3 tablespoons olive oil
2 cloves diced garlic
Salt to taste

Directions:

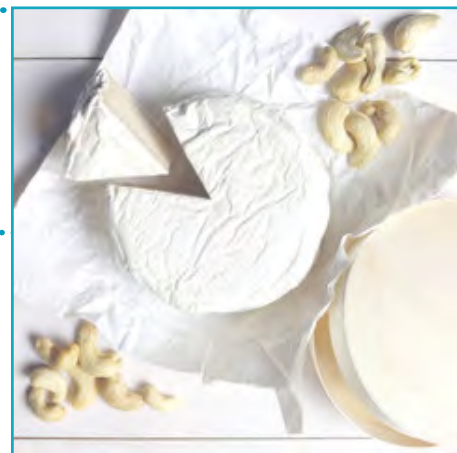
1. Drain the tofu for couple of hours in a colander or squeeze it on the spot by hand one handful at the time.
2. In a bowl mash the tofu by fork into a fine crumble.
3. To the crumbled tofu, add the nutritional yeast flakes, olive oil, diced garlic and salt. Add other condiments or veggies you like (chopped green olives, green onions). Mix well with the fork and serve on toast. Enjoy!!!



Cashew Cheese | Tina Alexa

Ingredients:

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| 1/2 cup soaked cashews | 1.5 tablespoons nutritional yeast flakes |
| 3 tablespoons tapioca starch | Salt to taste |
| 1 tablespoon lemon juice | 1/2 teaspoons garlic powder |
| 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar | Turmeric or smoked paprika (optional) |
| 2 tablespoons coconut oil | 2/3 cup water |



Assemble the Salad:

1. Place all the ingredients in the blender and blend till smooth.
2. Place 2 tablespoons agar agar in 1 cup water and boil. Lower heat and boil for 5 minutes.
3. Add the agar agar mixture the blender. Blend mixture all together.
4. Place in a mold and let it cool. Then place in refrigerator for a few hours.

Scrambled Tofu | By Liliane Balbach

Ingredients:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| 1 lbs. tofu, extra firm | red pepper (optional) | 2 teaspoons nutritional yeast flakes |
| 1 Tbs. olive oil | 2 teaspoons. chicken-like seasoning (McKay's) | 1 tablespoon Bragg Liquid Aminos or soy sauce |
| 1 medium chopped onion | 3/4 teaspoon turmeric | 1/2 cup raw cashews, washed in warm water |
| 1-2 cloves garlic | 1 tsp. salt | 1/2 cup water |
| 1/2 cup chopped green or | 1/2 teaspoon onion powder | |

Assemble the Salad:

1. Drain liquid from tofu. Press it between paper towels and drain some more.
2. Sauté onion in olive oil until translucent.
3. Crumble the tofu with a fork. Add it with the spices to the onion mixture. Cook mixture over medium heat 5 minutes or until done.



Simple Overnight Oats | By Katherine Lee

Ingredients:

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 cup non-dairy milk—soy, rice or oat
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

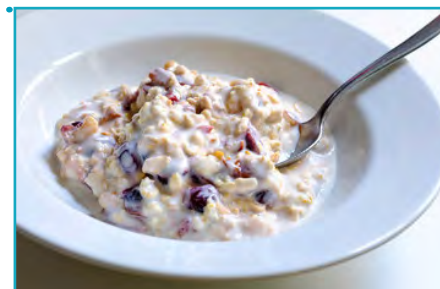
Optional toppings:

- 2 tablespoons ground flaxseeds or chia seeds
- chopped walnuts or almonds
- 1-2 tablespoons natural peanut butter

- 1/2 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- chopped dates or raisins
- sprinkle of cinnamon
- drizzle or pure maple syrup or honey

Instructions:

1. Combine the oats and non-dairy milk in a small pot. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
2. In the morning, eat the oats cold, or cook them for 10-15 minutes or microwave for 1 minute.
3. Top with optional toppings. Enjoy!



Hope in Difficult Times

"I will lift up my eyes to the hills—from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep" (Psalm 121:1-4, NKJV).

"Why are you cast down, O my soul? and why are you disquieted within me? hope you in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psalm 42:1, AKJV).

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13, NKJV).

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