

Nutrition and Wellness in the treatment of Depression.

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Depression continues to be one of the largest problems we face in society today. Newly released statistics from the National Alliance for Mental Health revealed that over one fourth of the United States presently suffers from depression. Unfortunately, this trend only continues to be increasing. Depression is projected to be the second leading cause of disability worldwide by 2020 (Cann, 2012). Antidepressants continue to be widely prescribed by both Primary Care Physicians and Psychiatrists however the increase in depression continues to climb. Annual costs using medication to treat depression is currently estimated to be over \$ 12 billion dollars as of 2013! Clearly medication alone is not the answer...so what is?

Clinicians have known for years that Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Mindfulness in combination with an anti-depressant increases efficacy in treatment. If you add Nutrition and Wellness into the mix then it even further supports client improvement. Good nutrition provides the foundation for a good mood, and is an important complement to medication and cognitive behavioral therapy in the treatment of depression.

Studies are beginning to link certain dietary patterns with an increase in the incidence of depression. Several studies have been published since 2000 demonstrating that depression is more common when a population is consuming a high fat, refined diet with a low intake of fruit and vegetables. In contrast, a more natural, Mediterranean style diet with lots of fruit, vegetables and fish seems to offer more relief against these symptoms. Studies also reflect that depression is often times linked to obesity (Floriana, 2010).

Our brain and digestive system are linked via the Vagus nerve and they are constantly in communication with one another. If the brain is not healthy neither is the gut and vice versa. This impacts overall mood and leads to systemic inflammation which directly impacts hormones and immune regulation. This can lead to inflammation in the brain which directly impacts the hypothalamus affecting the areas of sleep, stress, weight, in addition to impacting the sympathetic nervous system. (Cann, 2012)

Research indicates that there is no substitution for adding nutrition and exercise into treatment planning for the majority of mental health disorders including depression. Supplementation is also encouraged and it is recommended to consult with a nutritionist or professional who specializes in wellness and nutrition/supplementation in addition to coordinating care with the primary care physician. By adding proper nourishment through nutrition, wellness, and exercise systemic inflammation can be treated and healed in addition to improving hormone regulation while improving digestive health. This in turn leads to overall quality of life improvement as well a reduction of depressive symptoms.

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