

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

by

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Here is the “Narrative” That will Go Along With the Notes Below:

Depression has been called "the worst disease." This is both because it impacts so many people, and also because there is just nothing particularly good about being depressed.

About 15% of all people, of any age, will become depressed at some point during their lifetime. Depression impacts men and women, rich and poor, young and old.

There are several different factors involved in this illness that we call major depression. There are biochemical factors, and hormonal factors, and genetic factors. Our life experiences, especially losses in life, also can increase the odds of our becoming depressed.

There are emotional, psychological, and spiritual factors to depression. There is a loss of the ability to experience pleasure, or to feel loved. There is a sense of hopelessness or helplessness. There is often a strong sense of worthlessness, or the sense that no one would care whether they live or die. And there is often a sense of a great distance between themselves and other people, and between themselves and God. There is loneliness.



Call Dr. Doug Cowan, MFT at (661) 972-5953

There are different levels to depression. Like most things it falls on a scale from mild to severe. We might use words like "Aversion," and "Reactive Depression," and then "Major Depression," to talk about the different places along this scale.

"Aversion" usually is the word that we used to describe a brief sadness, or strong sense of frustration. "Reactive depression" is the phrase that we use to describe a deep sense of grief or loss, but it is usually short-lived and will resolve by itself given enough time – weeks or months.

But "Major Depression" is different. It is a long-term condition. It involves the loss of ability to feel pleasure. It is chronic and debilitating. And sometimes people die from depression.

The most common symptoms include negative thinking, a great sense of grief or guilt, the inability to enjoy deep sleep, early-morning awakening, a decrease in appetite, the inability to feel pleasure, and very often self-injury from cutting to suicide. Depression involves the activation of stress hormones, causing the over-activation of the sympathetic nervous system. Often depressed people are also agitated and cannot relax.

Several different neurotransmitters may be involved in depression.

Depression is linked neurologically to anger, anxiety, worry, frustration, chronic pain, and even unforgiveness.

Depression is often linked to hormone problems. About 20% of major depressive episodes are from Thyroid imbalances. Women are most vulnerable to depression after giving birth, around their menstrual period, and around menopause.

Depression is also linked to stress hormones. They are generally elevated during the depression. High levels of stress hormones will decrease levels of dopamine and serotonin. Some people are at risk for a major depressive episode after having experienced four or five major stress events during their life.

30 to 40% of people with major depressive episodes can be treated successfully with just medical biological interventions such as an antidepressant medication. But 60% to 70% cannot. These people will need additional interventions in addition to medications. Counseling therapy is often most helpful.

There are genetic and family aspects to depression. If one twin is depressed for example, the other twin has a 50% chance of becoming depressed. But 50% of twins do not. With siblings, if one sibling suffers a major depressive episode, the other siblings have a 25% chance of becoming depressed. Genetics are important, but they are not any more important than any other element. Genetics are about vulnerability, not inevitability.

If you were feeling very very sad, very very worried, or depressed, you should go to your medical doctor as soon as possible. Ask your doctor to check your thyroid function, and for women to check your estrogen and progesterone levels and ratios, and for men to check your testosterone levels. Get a good medical evaluation and complete physical. Ask your doctor if you need medications for depression.

If you are depressed, medications sometimes can make a day and night improvement in just two or three weeks. It is also very important that you begin to sleep eight hours a night. Whenever you can relax to lower your stress levels.

Other helpful interventions include optimal nutrition, supportive counseling and cognitive therapy, and doing the work that it takes to make things right between yourself and other people or God. Peace is what we seek.

Dr. Douglas Cowan, Psy.D. is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (M24381) with offices in Bear Valley Springs and Bakersfield, CA. Call his office at (661) 972-5953 or visit his website at [http:// DouglasCowan.me](http://DouglasCowan.me) for more information.

Understanding Depression

Crippling: The "Worst" Disease

Pervasive: 15% in Lifetime

World-wide: #4 Cause of Disability

Bio-Chemical Factors

- Biochemical Illness
- Genetic Factors
- Takes Away Ability to Experience "Pleasure"
- Neurotransmitter Involvement
- Hormonal Involvement

Psychological Factors

- Influenced by Early Experiences Especially "Loss"
- There is no sense of "pulling yourself out of it"

"Spiritual" Factors

- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Worthlessness
- Distance from God and from Loved Ones

Aversion

- Brief Sadness
- Frustration

Reactive Depression

- Grief
- Loss

Major Depression

- Long Term
- Loss of Ability to Feel Pleasure

Leads to being more sensitive to being triggered again

Major Symptoms:

Activation of Stress Hormones, Over-Activation of Sympathetic Nervous System
Rhythmic Patterns to the Depression are common



Biology of Depression: Neuro-Transmitters

Nor-Epinephrine

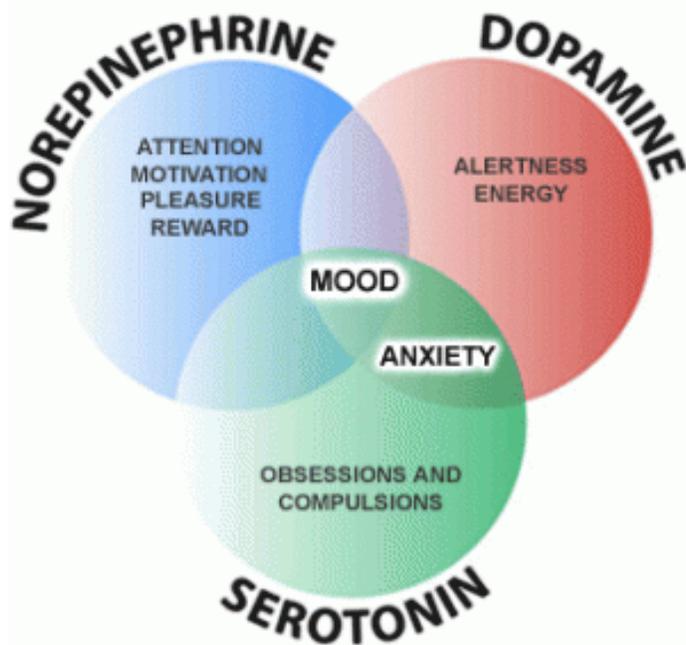
- Pleasure Pathways are Stimulated by NE
- Low NE > mostly causes Psycho-Motor Retardation

Dopamine

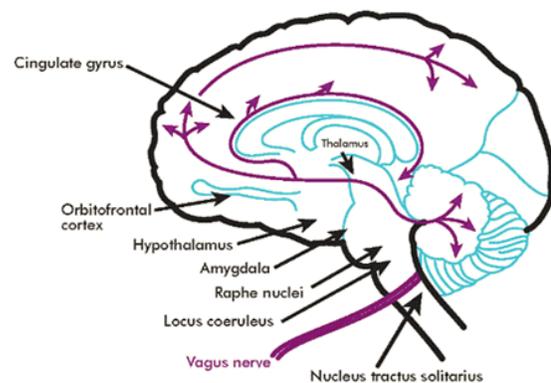
- Cocaine works on Dopamine Pathways
- Low Dopamine > Loss of Ability to Feel Pleasure

Serotonin

- Gives a sense of Well Being
- Low Serotonin > Excessive sense of Grief or Loss, Guilt or Shame, and Obsessions



Substance “P” neurotransmitter Transmits “pain” signals in the brain. If the levels of Substance “P” are reduced in the brain, symptoms of depression improve because the brain processes “psychic pain” in the same way as “physical pain.”



Neuro-Anatomy:

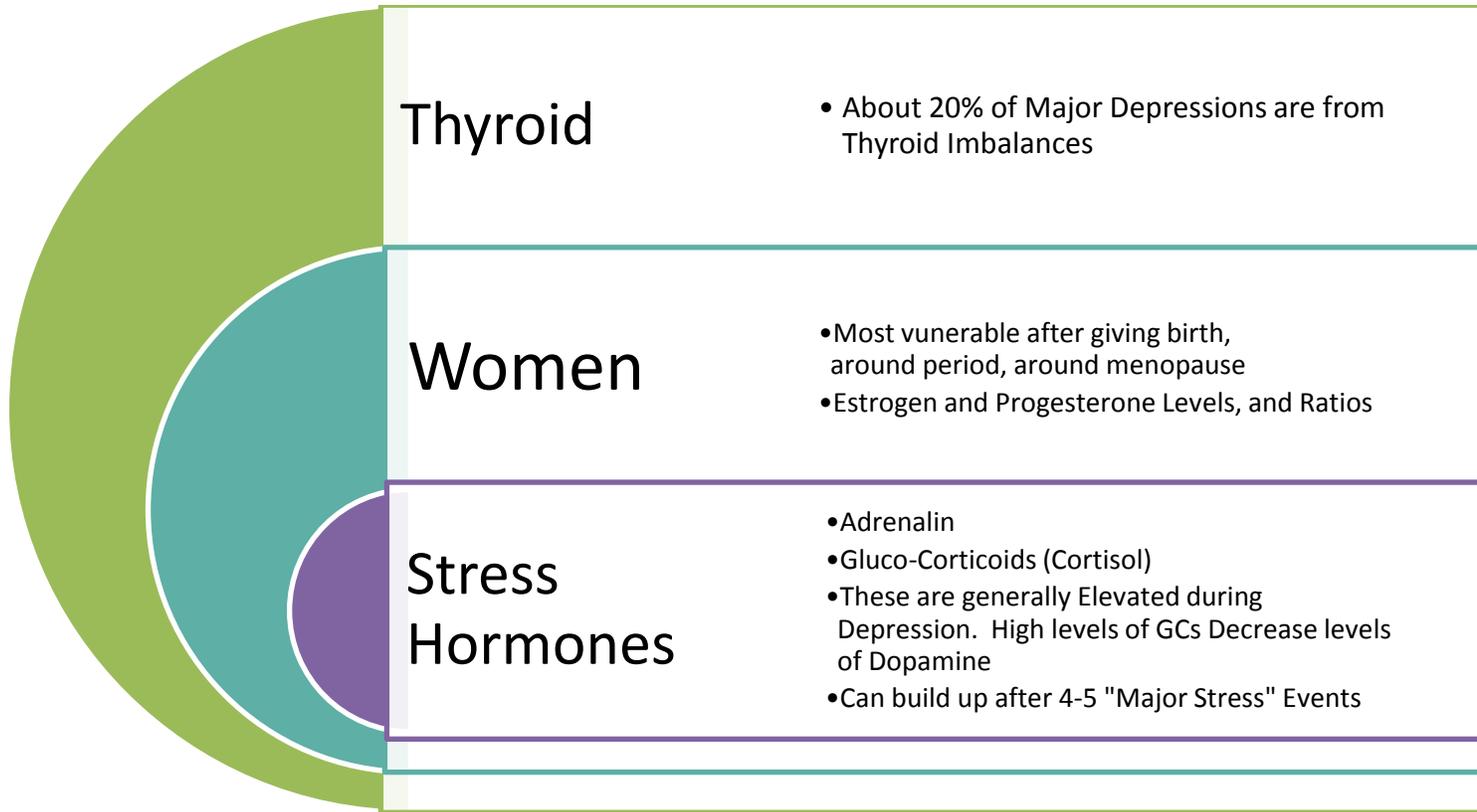
Reptilian – regulations of body functions

Limbic System – emotions, stress hormones

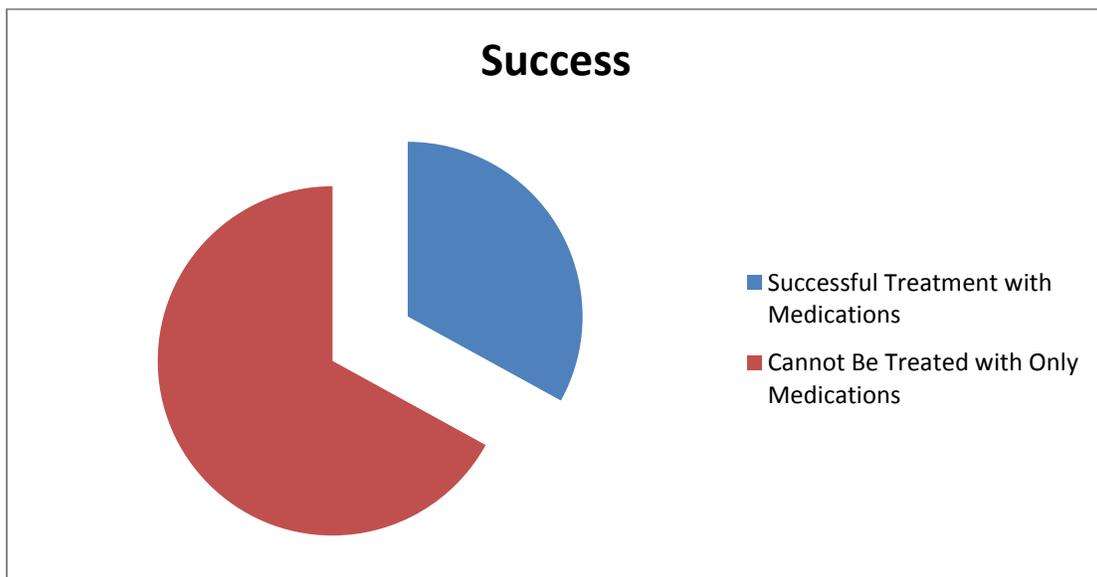
Cortex – complex processing of information

- doesn't make a difference between psychic pain and physical pain or danger
- drives the rest of the brain to act “as if...”

Hormones:



30% to 40% of Depressives can be treated successfully with just Medical-Biological Interventions. But 60% to 70% cannot. They will need Additional Interventions as well.



Emotional - Psychological Factors

Freud

- Mourning
- Melancholia
- Anger Turned Inward becomes Depression

Learned Helplessness

- Cannot Avoid or Escape Pain
- No Control
- Hopelessness, Helplessness

Stress From Loss or Grief

- Dumps Stress Hormones
- Intersection Between Mind and Body
- Loss of a Parent Prior to Age 10

What's the difference between "mourning" and "melancholia"?

- 📖 Mourning - Loss of a loved one > focus on the love;
- 📖 Melancholia - Loss of a loved one > focus on the loss;
- 📖 Aggression turned "in-ward" = depression

Learned Helplessness

- 📖 Cannot avoid the pain, so give up
- 📖 No control, helplessness, hopelessness

The stressors of loss (psychological stress) dump stress hormones.

- 📖 Stress is the intersection between psychological factors and biological factors.
- 📖 Loss of a parent to death prior to age 10 increases risks of major depression later in life.
- 📖 What about divorce? Abandonment?
- 📖 Loss of control, helplessness

Genetics: Depression Tends to Run in Families

Twin Studies : If one twin is depressed, the other twin has a 50% chance of becoming depressed (but 50% do not).

Siblings : if one is depressed, the others have a 25% chance

Half-siblings : if one is depressed, the others have an 8% chance

Genetics Are Important, But . . .

Genetics are important, but not more important than any other component.

Genetics are about vulnerability, not inevitability

The specific Gene related to depression: serotonin receptors and processing

Only a problem gene if there is a history of exposure to major stressors such as the death of parent, divorce, abandonment, disasters, trauma, abuse. This increases depression rates by 30%, but it is not deterministic (70% don't)

This gene is powered by stress hormones (gluco-corticoids)

Depression is a Real Biological Disorder

But people don't talk about it because it is seen as just a "mental disorder," or "moral flaw," or "lack of faith," or "lack of pulling yourself up by the boot-straps."

Helpful Things to Do

For Biological and Neurological Factors



Medications: "Day and Night"

Take the Time to Sleep

Relaxation to Lower Stress

Regarding Hormones Check Your Levels, Ratios



Thyroid Function

Estrogen, Progesterone

Testosterone in Males

Anti-depressant medications can be very helpful now. Something to help you sleep well for a few days may also be helpful. Consider EEG Neurofeedback as another intervention that can improve the "dys-regulation" of the brain and improve sleep and mood.

Nutrition: From David Nelson, Ph.D. Nutritionist

- Parent Essential Oils – Essential Fatty Acids ("Yes" oils, or a broad spectrum variety)
 - Coconut, olive, sunflower, safflower, flax seed, primrose, borage, walnut, etc
- Phosphatidylcholine (a phospholipid)
- Butyric Acid – eat from ½ to 1 entire stick of butter every day
- If thyroid is a problem, use iodine supplement (Ioderal or Lugal's formula)
- Multi-Minerals
- Methyl B-12 and Methyl Folic Acid
- Deprex and Express by VAXA (nutrition2you.com)

Emotional Factors:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Supportive Counseling, Grief focused counseling
- Read aloud the 23rd Psalm x5 per day, prayer

Douglas Cowan, Psy.D., M.S.

- Personal Therapy and Counseling, Tehachapi, CA (661) 972-5953
- DouglasCowan.ME

Depression : Things to Do This Week

Please visit your doctor to get a physical examination ASAP.

We need to look at the following:

- Thyroid hormone levels. Are they low? Are they low for you?
Low thyroid hormone levels account for about 20% of major depressive episodes.
- Estrogen, Progesterone, and Testosterone hormone levels and ratios.
Are these levels ok? Many episodes of major depression in women are the result of these hormones being too low, or not in the right ratios to each other.
- Cholesterol levels. If they are too low, your body cannot make hormones as efficiently as it should. If they are too high, it is likely due to too much stress hormones in your system. To lower stress hormones right now, consider trying Exstress (an OTC). It is a good product available from <http://Nutrition2You.com>
- Also, ask your doctor if there is something that can help you get a good night's sleep for the next week. This is very important now.
- Talk to your doctor about if an Anti-Depressant Medication may help now.

Please pick up a few things at the market and begin adding them into your diet:

- Oils – coconut, olive, sunflower, safflower, flax seed, borage, walnut, etc.
Add 2-3 spoonfuls per day into your meals.
- Butter – cook with butter. Try to use ½ cube of butter or more every day.
- Phosphatidyl-choline is a phospho-lipid. Available at health food stores.
- If your thyroid levels might be a problem, an iodine supplement might help. Look for “Ioderal” or “Lugal's formula.”
- Use a multi- mineral supplement daily (liquids are good).
- A methylated B-12 and methylated folic acid supplement may be helpful.

Finally...

Begin to make a list of people and events that have **hurt** and **wounded** you, and **losses** that you have suffered in life. Are there hurtful things that you think about a lot? Begin to make a **list** of each of them.

Are there **people** that need to **be forgiven** by you? Not that they deserve it, but it just may help to set you free from the hurt, and allow some of the wounds to heal. Make a list of these people, and **what they did** to you to hurt you. Perhaps a counselor or pastor could help you as you consider this.

About Dr. Doug Cowan, M.F.T.

Douglas Cowan is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist with over 25 years of experience in helping children, teenagers, and adults to be more successful in school, at home, and in their relationships. His offices are in Bakersfield, CA and also just outside of Tehachapi in beautiful Bear Valley Springs, CA.

- He has his Doctorate in Psychology, a Master of Science degree in Marriage, Family, and Child Counseling, and a Bachelors of Arts degree in Philosophy-Religion.
- Dr. Cowan is among the most well-known, skilled and experienced therapists in Kern County.
- He is the host of "The Living Room" radio broadcast Sunday evenings on KAXL 88.3 "LifeFM" in Bakersfield, CA.
- He and his family have lived in Tehachapi since 1988. He has served as a pastor at two churches, has coached youth baseball and hockey, and is a sought-after speaker at local



events such as the Tehachapi Mayor's Prayer Breakfast in 2014 as pictured below.



Douglas Cowan has been a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (M24381) since 1988, and has helped people to change, and grow, and heal in a variety of settings, including private practices, inpatient hospital settings, and as a minister working in a church setting.

He has written over 200 articles for parents and teachers on topics such as ADHD, and parenting, and his websites have provided information to over 1,000,000 parents and teachers since 1986. Today his ADHD newsletter for parents has over 9,600 subscribers.

Dr. Cowan is a professional and licensed therapist (MFT 24381) who, like any healthcare or service provider, charges a fee for his services, expertise, and time. The office does not bill insurance carriers typically, though there is one exception. As a way of saying "thank you" to our servicemen and women, Dr. Cowan is a member of the TriCare Panel of Providers.

Together we try to figure out what the problem is, and how best to solve the problem. And then, once the problem is solved, to help individuals and families to grow stronger in their love, and faith, and commitment to others. Counseling is more an “art” than a science. It involved providing direction, or advice, that leads to a course of action that moves the situation to a better place. Counseling is the application of wisdom, experience, education, and expertise to your situation, for your benefit.

Dr. Douglas Cowan offers hope and direction as a Professional Christian Counseling from his private office in peaceful Bear Valley Springs. Dr. Cowan is available to help those who are working through problems like:

- **Depression**, or Long-term **Sadness** or **Frustration**;
- **Anxiety, Fear**, or Worry;
- **ADHD** in Children, Teens, or Adults;
- Personal or Relationship **Conflicts**;
- **Teenagers** who are in Trouble or Non-Compliant, or Depressed;
- The Pain of **Grief**, or Loss;
- The Turmoil of **Unforgiveness**.

These kinds of situations are difficult both for the individual suffering through the problem, and also for his or her family and friends. Our relationships are important to nurture and protect. “Be kind and compassionate to one another...” is the Apostle’s encouragement to us, “...forgiving each other...”

 **For more information call our office at (661) 972-5953.**

Douglas Cowan is a follower of Jesus Christ. He believes that when life seems very difficult or uncertain that there are three truths that one can cling to:

1. The Nature and Character of God is good, and does not change
2. That God has uniquely designed and gifted us for a purpose
3. That God actually really, really loves us – always

He believes in the potential of people to change and have freedom from the thoughts, fears, or cravings that seem to enslave them. He believes that marriages, families, and relationships can be restored, and that sins can be forgiven. Because of the power of Jesus Christ to change us, Dr. Cowan is optimistic that God can speak “light” into any situation, no matter how dark it seems.

