

**Nawei's Acupuncture Clinic
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Depression and Chinese Medicine

By Dr. Nawei Jiang

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Depression is one of the most common mood disorders affecting approximately 20% of the population at some point during their lives. And, women are approximately 2 times more likely than men to experience depression. Today, more than 30 million Americans are taking anti-depressant drugs, and over 130 million prescriptions were written for anti-depressants in 1998. One may assume these numbers have only grown. *According to the Physician Desk Reference*, the top anti-depressant drugs address only the signs and symptoms of the disease and can cause a myriad of side effects: insomnia, anxiety, listlessness, fatigue, loss of appetite, and sexual dysfunction.

In order for a person to be diagnosed with depression, four or five of the following symptoms must persist for two weeks, and not be due to another physical condition, medication, alcohol, drugs, or normal bereavement:

- Persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness
- Weight loss or gain
- Lose of all interest in pleasurable activities, including sex
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Irritability
- Guilt
- Poor concentration or indecision
- Abnormal thoughts of death and suicide

Causes of Depression

As with all disease, we need an accurate diagnosis before we can begin treatment. Depression has many causes. Not all of them will be helped by antidepressants. If your self-esteem is intact, your mood does not vary during the day, and you are not impaired socially, your depression may have a physical cause.

Some physical/biomedical causes of depression are: chronic pain, chronic fatigue, normal grief, vitamin B12 deficiency anemia, folate deficiency anemia, viral disease, connective tissue/collagen disorders (arthritis), an organic brain disorder, drug side-effects, cancer,

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and endocrine abnormalities. Chinese Medicine can enhance the health of anyone with any of these conditions.

Traditional Chinese Medicine and Depression

Every healthy person has experienced some form of depression in his or her life. It is a healthy response to overwhelming events in our lives. When we are healthy, physically and mentally, we can usually bounce back from a depressed state within a couple of weeks, and continue on with our normal lives. But when feelings become persistent and occur without precipitating factors, true depression may set in.

Chinese medicine recognizes a powerful interplay between the body and emotions; the two are, in fact, inseparable. When we become emotionally upset, our internal environment also becomes disrupted, leading to the physical symptoms of depression. When we are physically compromised, our emotions can be greatly affected.

According to Chinese medical theories, depression is often the result of an imbalance or blockage in the body's energetic organ meridian systems. If the Qi becomes obstructed or the quality becomes insufficient, emotional upset, anxiety/depression, illness and disease may occur. Many things may cause the Qi to become blocked or insufficient: physical trauma, emotional trauma, hereditary weakness, poor diet, and chemical, physical and emotional stress.

A ground breaking pilot study at the University of Arizona studied the treatment of depression using traditional, individually tailored acupuncture treatment, within the structure of a double-blind, randomized, control trial. Twelve sessions were held over an eight-week period, with an additional session per week for the next eight weeks that also treated the control and placebo groups. At the end of the study, 64% of the participants were judged to be in full remission of their symptoms.

Treating Depression with Acupuncture and Herbal Therapy

The treatments for depression combine acupuncture and herbal therapy. The herbal supplementation is key to the effectiveness of the treatments. The treatments will not be as effective without the supplements. The herbal formulas are used to address stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia.

In addition, Chinese Medical treatment for depression does not just alleviate the symptoms of depression but seeks to find and then eradicate the root cause of this disease.

Can one combine Western & Chinese Medicine?

Yes. In many cases, such a combination is the best and quickest way of treating depression. Chinese medicine, including acupuncture, can be used to lessen or eliminate

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the side effects of Western antidepressants, while a certain amount of psychotherapy can help the Chinese treatment go faster.