

Practitioner Perspective – The Lowdown on antidepressants
By Brian Dodds

I doubt there has been a more stressful time in history than the age we are living in now. It isn't the type of stress where the cause is plain to see... It's a lot more subtle...so subtle we often don't even know why we're stressed, so we tell ourselves that something must be wrong with us personally.

Personally, I found life while living in Third World Countries less depressing than at home here in New Zealand. To put it bluntly, the sick have already died and the ones still living are alive...very alive. They take life as it is and cherish the good times. Each one of them is reminded every day of how fragile life can be.

Why do I find it more depressing in NZ? Why are so many of us like the “walking dead” with our feelings half shut down? This question sounds like an exaggeration but it rings true to me when I return to NZ from third world countries.

There is a long list of reasons, including our sense of disconnection to cultural and family ties, our nutrition is severely deficient, filled with preservatives and additives to keep it stable and looking pretty, and worst of all, medical systems focus on symptomatic treatments rather than addressing the cause of most illness. This may enable us to function on some level but the root cause of our illness festers away deep down inside.

Let's talk about two common drugs used to treat psychological conditions. One is a famous antidepressant, known as prozac. People who suffer from depression commonly have low levels of “the feel good neurotransmitter” serotonin. Prozac slows the breakdown of serotonin so it can function a little longer. This drug based approach raises serotonin levels so that the person will have sensations of happiness regardless of fears, belief systems and experiences. This happiness usually continues only as long as the drugs are being taken. These antidepressant drugs artificially increase the chemical that is produced naturally giving false euphoria, they do not address why the person was depressed in the first place, so, in my opinion, they are only treating the symptoms.

Many people choose to obtain some relief through antidepressants and hope to address the real cause later on. Most are initially very thankful. However, after a period of stability, these people are still faced with three challenges:

- 1) Cope with the drug's physical and mental side effects
- 2) Overcome possible withdrawal symptoms
- 3) Address the original underlying condition

Tranquilisers are another group of drugs commonly prescribed, the most famous being Valium. To cut a long story short, tranquilisers slow the nervous system down. Those taking them may feel quite peaceful in this detachment, but they will be less connected with their physical reality. In simple terms, they will no longer be fully alive and in touch with their authentic selves.

Common sense tells me it is better to investigate and work with the belief systems and traumas that originally brought about the depression than to mask the problem with

drugs. Drugs don't make the problem go away and eventually one must deal with the trauma or the anxiety at the deepest level. It is true, some unpleasant things can be uncovered and support is very necessary. This support can be in the form of family, counselling, personal growth workshops and natural herbs and nutrients such as St John's wort, valerian, fish oil and others. These natural remedies balance the body, so one can handle the processes much easier and may help relieve negative emotions by working on their deeper cause.

If, after reading this article, you believe this to be true, then you are now in a position to make new choices for yourself and your family. You can choose to avoid joining the ranks of the 'living dead.'

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