

DEPRESSION

Depression is a mood disorder characterized by feelings of sadness, discouragement, and despair. Almost everyone has experienced some form of depression resulting from life events and this is normal. However, if these feelings occur without external events and are persistent, major depression has set in.

Contemporary western psychiatry defines major/clinical depression as depressive episodes that last more than 2 weeks that are accompanied with at least 4 of the following symptoms:

- changes in appetite
- weight loss or gain
- sleep disturbances
- fatigue or lethargy
- feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- difficulty thinking
- suicidal thoughts

This type of depression is called unipolar and can be caused by a reaction to stressful life events or arise from changes in the brain. Depressive disorder is most common between the ages of 25 – 40 and twice as common in women.

Conventional treatment employs the use of anti-depressant pharmaceuticals, psychiatric counselling, and cognitive behaviour therapy. Most drugs are used to increase serotonin levels such as Prozac and Paxil. However, like most drugs, anti-depressants can cause a myriad of side effects including diarrhea, dizziness, dry mouth, headache, nausea, shaking, weight gain, etc.

It is projected that over 121 million people worldwide suffer from major depression and that 15% of the general public will suffer from major depression at least once in their life.

Depression can be either primary or secondary. Primary occurs without any underlying physical conditions while secondary occurs as a result of pre-existing physical conditions. Because of the complexity behind depression, it is imperative that the underlying root cause is addressed in order to administer the most effective treatment protocol.

Depression adversely affects every area of a person's life and if left untreated can have dire consequences on health and can even result in suicide.

TCM Diagnosis and Treatment of Depression

TCM theorizes that the body and mind are inseparable. Because of this non-duality, physiological events in the body may manifest as mental-emotional sensations and experiences. Conversely, psychological events may cause negative effects on the physiology of the body.

In addition to noting symptoms when diagnosing depression, the TCM practitioner also observes the patient's complexion, eyes and general demeanor to assess the severity. After uncovering the root cause and pattern, a suitable treatment plan is created that involves either acupuncture, herbal medicine or a combination of both. The length of treatment depends on the severity and duration of the condition but generally starts with one acupuncture treatment per week for 4 weeks, then bi-weekly for 8 weeks and finally once a month or bi-monthly for stabilization.

Case Study

A study was conducted involving 20 patients between the ages of 25 – 50. Six had been diagnosed by a psychiatrist as having a minor depressive disorder and were prescribed anti-depressants. Fourteen had been diagnosed by a TCM doctor as having anxiety and mild depression. All 20 patients were treated with TCM—11 with acupuncture, 4 with herbal medicine and 5 with a combination of both. The group of 14 that were diagnosed with anxiety and mild depression were successful in controlling their symptoms with maintenance. Five of the six patients who were diagnosed by their psychiatrist as suffering from minor depressive disorder were able to slowly reduce and eventually eliminate their dependency on drugs.

Summary

Because TCM uncovers the root cause through pattern differentiation, the long term prognosis for patients with anxiety and depression after being treated with acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine is excellent.