



HEALING DEPRESSION WITH AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Depression is a strong feeling of sadness that lasts more than 2 weeks. It is an illness affecting a vast number of people in the globe with an estimated 15% of people experiencing severe, chronic depression at some point in their lives. While almost everyone has experienced depression to some degree as a feeling of extreme sadness and melancholy, more and more people are being diagnosed and treated for clinical depression, a mood disorder characterized by ongoing sadness, anger, loss or frustration that lasts for weeks, months, or years and interferes with one's abilities to work, go to school and perform the functions of normal daily life. The number of people dealing with depression is doubling every 10 years. While many medications have been developed to deal with this issue and they can be necessary in severe cases, generally most individuals will receive the same type of treatment and the root cause may go unchecked. Depression and anxiety have become an inseparable part of modern man's life. Depression is usually the result of old unresolved emotional problems that have not been addressed, often from childhood. In Charaka *Samhita*, Acharya Charaka described general line of treatment for all mental disorders as: "*Manaso Dnyana Vidnyana Dhairya Smriti Samadhibhihi*".

KEYWORDS: Depression; *Manas Roga*; *Avasada*; *Vata*; *Pitta*; *Kapha*

INTRODUCTION

Depression is a major health epidemic affecting 10-15% of the population of the western world.¹ Western medicine does not attribute a precise cause to depression and medical researchers are currently exploring theories linking clinical depression to genetics as well as to abnormalities in brain biochemistry. Depression can be triggered by disruption to normal brain chemistry caused by factors such as long-term sleep disturbance, long-term use of drugs affecting the endocrine system, patterns of drug and alcohol abuse and diseases of the thyroid.² Depression can also be triggered by stressful or traumatic events.

Ayurveda treats every ailment with its holistic approach and so is depression. Depression is diagnosed by the ongoing presence of some or all of the following symptoms present continuously over time and of such severity that they interfere with the functions of everyday life.^{3, 4} These symptoms are negative distortion of world view, negative attitude, hopelessness, pessimism, helplessness, low self esteem, sadness, agitation,

restlessness, irritability, anxiety, changes in appetite, weight gain/weight loss, difficulty concentrating, fatigue or low energy, feelings of worthlessness, feelings of self-hate, guilt, withdrawal and/or isolation.

AVASADA(Depression)

The word *Avasada*(=depression) is derived from the root *Av+sad+dhyani*. The synonyms are *avasadita* (sad, lazy), *vishada* (sadness, melancholy) and *sadanam* (sadness, dejection). *Avasada* literally means depression. The word *vishada* has been mentioned in the context of *manasa dosha vikara*. Madhava Nidana codes the term *Avasada* in connection of *vata vikara*. Charaka used the term *sadanam* which means “a sense of depression” (*Ch. Chi. 62/69*). The other philosophical texts like Chhandogya Upanishada (*Atyantamatmana Charyukta Avasadyayan, 2:28-2*) and Bhagavad Gita (*Natmanam Avasadayet, 6/5*) have also described the term *Avasada*. The word *Avasada* has been used in relation to *chitta* disorder or stimulating depressive illness.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

There can be minor to major symptoms of depression. Sometimes a patient assumes his symptoms to be normal mood fluctuations which actually may be a start of depression. These symptoms can be:

- i. Excessive fatigue and muscle weakness
- ii. Sweating and tremors
- iii. Palpitations and headaches
- iv. Interrupted sleep and seeing nightmares
- v. Shortness of breath
- vi. Indigestion and stomach upsets
- vii. Loss of pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed
- viii. Suicidal tendencies
- ix. Insomnia
- x. Excessive sleep
- xi. Worsening of co-existing chronic disease

DEPRESSION: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

Our level of consciousness is considered to have different sheaths. Ours self resides in our heart which is the seat for the blissful sheath or *Aanandamaya kosha*.

Another *kosha* of mind other than the heart is the *Manomaya kosha*. When we are hurt or shocked or a sorrowful incident occurs, we use our mind at that moment to construct a protective barrier around ourselves. In some cases this barrier causes one to lose access to the essential self and the result is depression.

Free flow of *Prana* allows the doshas (bodily humors) to balance the seven *dhatu*s (tissues) to develop and the gross channels (*srothas*) of circulation like blood and lymph to move. When exposed to etiological factors, the flow of energy or *prana shakti* is also restricted and the person gradually loses interest in life.

Satwa, Rajasa and Tamasa are the three mental qualities. *Satwika* mental quality activates a person's cleanliness, intellect, happiness, positive thoughts and confidence. *Rajasa* quality induces dynamism, talkativeness, ego, anger etc. *Tamasa* quality activates lack of intelligence, fear, excessive sleep and lack of motivation etc. Harmonic equilibrium of these three mental qualities results in mental health. For a patient of depression achieving and sustaining equilibrium of these three qualities of mind is inevitable.

Depression is a *Kapha* predominant imbalance. *Vata* and *Pitta* may also go out of balance by the exposure to its etiological factors. *Vata* is vitiated by experiences that induce fear, terror, anxiety, irregular eating habit, pattern of sleep and all forms of excessive movement.

Pitta dosha is associated with metabolism of all things: food, emotions, and experiences. When emotional experiences cannot be digested they accumulate in the body and cause *dosha* imbalances. Alcohol, verbal abuse, excessive spices and over ambition will create *Pitta* depression which manifests as anger and violence. People suffering from a *Pitta* depression may commit suicide or engage in self destructive habits.

Initially the brain's powerful changes in electrochemistry cause *Vata* imbalance, this triggers a loss of enzymatic activities in the metabolism or *Pitta* imbalance. *Kapha* responds by trying to provide a protective sheath to slow everything down. This shut down mechanism, brings about heaviness, darkness and stagnation. This condition is interpreted as the negative message of hopelessness and depression.

PSYCHIC SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA:

1. *Dukkhatvam* (feeling of sadness)
2. *Atmano ashktata* (loss of self confidence)
3. *Asiddhi bhaya* (fear of failure)
4. *Anavasthita Chitta* (unstable mind)
5. *Nidravaishamya* (sleep disturbances)
6. *Ati chintana* (excessive thoughtfulness)
7. *Apravritti* (lack of activities)
8. *Aruchi* (loss of interest)
9. *Vishama abinivesha* (delusion)
10. *Dainya* (misery)
11. *Kheda* (guilt)
12. *Chitodvega* (anxiety)
13. *Dourbalya* (weakness)
14. *Nairashya* (hopelessness)
15. *Smriti rhasa* (decreased memory)
16. *Apraharsha* (lack of pleasure)
17. *Vishama Samvega* (emotional disturbances)
18. *Shoka* (excess grief)
19. *Krodhadhikya* (increased anger)

SOMATIC SYMPTOMS:

1. *Dourbalya* (weakness)
2. *Sharira sada* (lack of energy)
3. *Ksudhamandya* or *Kshudhaadhikya* (Anorexia nervosa or increased appetite)

SAMPRAPTI AND AETIOPATHOGENESIS:

“*Yatha dushtena doshena yathe cha anuvisarpata*

Nirvritihi aamayasyasou sampraptihi....”⁵

The Ayurvedic psychopathology and signs of *Chittavasada*: Charka *Samhita* has systematically described the concept of psychopathology in context of *Unmada*. The psychopathological condition is a function of eight essential psychological factors that are affected in varying degree in all psychiatric disorders:

- 1) *Mana Vibhrama*
- 2) *Buddhi Vibhrama*
- 3) *Sajna Vibhrama*
- 4) *Smriti Vibhrama*
- 5) *Bhakti Vibhrama*
- 6) *Sheela Vibhrama*
- 7) *Cheshta Vibhrama*
- 8) *Aachara*

BHEDA (TYPES): In Ayurveda *Chittavasada* can be broadly classified into two types on the basis of etiology.

1) *Nija*: This occurs due to the imbalance in innate *Sharirika* and *Manasika* factors. *Nija Chittavasada* can again be classified into two types like: *Manasika* comprising two subtypes as *Tamopradhana* and *Rajaspradhana*. *Sharirika* comprising four types depending upon the predominance of *dosha* involved as *Vataja*, *Pittaja*, *Kaphaja* and *Sannipatika* having all three vitiated *dosha*. These types can be differentiated by diagnosing the *Dosha bahulata* from presence of specific symptoms of *dosha* involved.

2) *Aagantuja*: Occurring due to the external factors like accidents, trauma etc. It can also be called as *Abhighatajanya* (*Sharirika* and *Manasika Abhighatajanya*).

AYURVEDIC LINE OF TREATMENT

Classical Ayurveda has the goal of alleviating all disease and suffering, including that related to *chitta*, which includes mental, psychological and emotional suffering. Ultimately the key to health on all levels is remembering one's true nature as spirit.⁶ When one remembers this truth and abides in this knowledge, one chooses actions that are congruent with health and wholeness.

DEPRESSION & ANXIETY TREATMENT PROCEDURES IN AYURVEDA

Treatment involves thorough understanding of the patient's unique constitution (*Prakruti*) and state of imbalance (*Vikruti*) of *doshas*. Ayurveda takes both the physical and mental plane into consideration while designing the treatment protocol. This system utilizes herbs and treatment procedures to correct the imbalances created in the mental plane of *doshas*. Food is divided into *Satwika*, *Rajasa* and *Tamasa* activating types. *Satwika ahara* should be strictly followed as per the physician's suggestion. This includes vegetables, fruits, non-spicy fresh foods.

Gradually the person moves towards his natural *prakruti* (*doshas* in balanced state) and the *mansikaroga* (mental disorders) vanishes. Treatment depends on the willingness of the patient. He or she should follow the guidelines of the physician and make the necessary lifestyle changes.

Abhyanga- Oil Massage with medicated oils is good in relieving depression.

Nasya- Nasal administration of suitable medicated oils procedure is believed to release drugs through blood brain barrier.

Shirodhara- Pouring of herbal oil on the forehead to promote relaxation.

Herbal Fumigation- Controlled inhalation of fumes of herbs such as *Guggulu*, *Jatamansi*, *Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*) etc are useful for this condition.

Color and aromatherapy also have applications in the treatment of depression. Use of the color gold can help to build *ojas* and increase mental endurance, stability and immunity. It is gently uplifting and transforms the consciousness to a *satvic* state. Essential oils of Tulsi, Calamus, Camphor and Wintergreen can help to detoxify the channels of the mind and promote emergence from the dull haze of depression. Myrrh, Frankincense, Sage and Mint promote the powers of perception.

Mantra is a powerful tool to change the energy field of the mind. All sounds, thoughts and words have their own vibratory power that affects the mind on the subconscious level. By repeating a *mantra*, it is embedded into one's consciousness. This repetition gives us the power to change the dominant thought forms of our minds.

NATURAL WAYS TO TREAT DEPRESSION WITHOUT REMEDIES ⁷

Key areas of your life that indirectly effect mental state are:

DIET

A healthy, balanced diet is not only important for physical health; it's vital for emotional wellbeing too. Try to eat a healthy and enough diet full with nutrition, carbohydrates and proteins. The foods you eat have a large effect on your mental functioning. Vitamins are the main part of energy source to our body. You can include more B vitamins into your diet. A person must not eat to full capacity. Hot, spicy and pungent tastes must be avoided as these will aggravate the senses further. Fruits, fresh vegetables and salads must become an important part of every meal. Most people with depression lose their appetite and desire to eat. For such people, food must not be forced or it could lead to vomiting. When such a disinterest in food occurs, fruits can be consumed. A diet rich in fruits is beneficial in the treatment of depression. An ideal diet which will assist in maintaining physical and mental health is suggested.

Caffeine – It is advisable to stop or at least reduce your consumption of products containing caffeine; things like coffee, tea, cola, and chocolate. Caffeine is a stimulant and stimulants *stimulate* the body; increasing mental and physical functioning. This includes increasing anxiety. Caffeine can become addictive and difficult to give up.

Sugar – Something else to limit is foods containing high refined sugar content. While sugar is a vital part of a person's diet – it's the brain's main source of energy – the instant release from refined sugar causes rapid swings in blood sugar levels with correspondingly rapid mood swings.

Foods with a high sugar content can become habit forming – even addictive and some people find them hard to resist. Foods containing natural sugar are much better. The body having to work a little harder processing them gets what it needs; a slow and steady release of fuel, not an instant rush.

Alcohol – Some people find that alcohol provides short term relief from their anxiety symptoms. It is because alcohol is a depressant; decreasing mental and physical functioning. However, one of the after effects of alcohol consumption is low blood sugar levels and this is a key component of anxiety and panic. Another problem with using alcohol to cope with stress and anxiety is developing alcohol dependence. The short term benefits are soon dwarfed by longer term problems that only add to the original stress and anxiety. So alcohol is rather a double edged sword when it comes to anxiety and it's best avoided.

EXERCISE

Regular exercise is proven to help combat anxiety and depression. In fact, many people find regular exercise to be as effective as antidepressants at lifting depression. The reasons aren't entirely clear; however, some connections are:

The mind and body are inextricably linked, so taking care of one naturally helps the other. So doing something to improve your physical health and appearance raises your confidence and self esteem making you feel generally happier and better able to cope with life. Feelings of having no control are a key component of anxiety and depression. Exercise gives back that sense of control over something. Exercise releases natural 'feel good' chemicals endorphins, dopamine and serotonin into the blood stream. These are the body's natural pain killers/happy pills; perfectly harmless and always available. Anxiety causes the release of adrenalin as part of the 'fight or flight' response. Your body is preparing for some kind of action, but the threat is all in the mind. Exercise helps burn off that excess adrenalin that has built up to deal with the threat your body wrongly prepared for. Exercise provides a useful distraction; taking your mind off of your worries for a while, thus breaking the cycle of negative thinking. Some people need a little extra motivation to get into the exercise habit. But exercise doesn't necessarily mean an intense session at the gym. Walking is an excellent form of exercise. It's amazing how much better even a brisk walk around the block can make you feel. Leave the car in the garage and walk to the supermarket if you don't have a lot to carry.

For some people, anxiety brings with it agoraphobia, making it harder to go out. However, there are still things you can try; like running up and down the stairs a few time, dancing to a favorite song.

RELAXATION

Relaxation is the antidote to anxiety; it's impossible to experience both at the same time. So while it's often difficult to consciously stop feeling anxious, it can be very much easier to take a sideways approach and do something that makes you feel more calm and relaxed. An anxious person has very tense muscles ready for action and maintaining that state of tension signals to the brain that the anxiety provoking situation is still

ongoing. Releasing that tension and relaxing – signals that the threat has passed. All is calm with the world and the mind can similarly calm down. Relaxing the mind or relaxing the body will have the same effect but the body is often easier to control.

SELF HYPNOSIS

Hypnosis works with the subconscious part of the mind. Something that many people find helps them relax and unwind is self hypnosis. When you imagine something vividly, the mind can't tell the difference between that and the real thing, that is why you can scare yourself with your thoughts. That's really all hypnosis is; switching off the conscious part of mind and using your imagination, only this time using in a more constructive way. So in your mind you can spend time on a beautiful island or wander through a dense forest and it's almost like being there.

FIND OUT REASON FOR DEPRESSION IN YOUR LIFE

Find the reasons that depress you. Overcome and forget those things and thinking about future and live in future with positive mindset. Avoid people who fetch negativity into your life.

MAKE NEW FRIENDS

If you have trouble because of relationship broken then don't worry about it. Get fresh and ready to make new relation and live healthy.

POSITIVE THINKING

You should have positive and creative approaches for all the things in this condition.

MEDITATION

Meditation is the best way to get cure from depression. This can be done for an hour daily.

YOGA

Yoga is also the better method to get rid from depression.

LISTEN MUSIC

It feels better to listen favorite music. Music can change the atmosphere, sing loudly along with music and dance.

AVOID DRUGS & QUIT SMOKING

The drugs, drinking and smoking are the key part to increases depression. You should avoid these things to better life.

HOME REMEDIES FOR DEPRESSION, ANXIETY & STRESS

- 1. Basil leaves with Yogurt:** Take 10-12 basil leaves and mix them into the yogurt. You can also add sugar to make it tasty. Mix this mixture properly. Use this remedy to boost the mental functions.
- 2. Fenugreek Seeds:** Fenugreek seeds are the best spice or herb to cure from many diseases. It is also very useful in stress and depression. You can use it and feel benefits.
- 3. Chamomile Tea:** You can use chamomile tea. It's an effective treatment for anxiety.
- 4. Lemon Balm:** Try lemon balm to get rid of anxiety and depression. It helps to maintain nervous system

functioning.

5. Fennel: Use and eat fennel seeds to improve and recover with stress and depression. It is useful to keep cool and calm your body temperature.

6. Lemon Juice: Drinking a glass of lemon juice daily is helpful as Lemon is the best energizer for our body.

8. Almond with Milk: Take 5-6 almonds and soak into the water at night. Peel off and grind them in the next morning. Add this paste into a glass of lukewarm milk. Thereafter, add some sugar to make it tasty and drink it.

9. Triphala Powder: Use Triphala with water at night is also beneficial to recover with it.

10. Cardamom Seeds: You can take 5-6 cardamom and chewing their seeds any time in a day.

11. Amla with Nutmeg: Take some juice of a fresh *Amla* (Indian Gooseberry). Add a few amount of nutmeg powder into it. Also add some rock salt. Mix them properly and drink it.

12. Boil 1 tablespoon rose petal in 1 cup of water for 2 minutes, let it cool. Add 1/2 teaspoon of Rock candy (*Mishri*) to it and drink twice a day to uplift your mood.

13. Take one teaspoon of **Asparagus** powder with half a teaspoon of honey twice a day along with warm milk. It works as a great brain tonic.

14. Boil celery **seeds, green cardamom powder, cinnamon powder** and rose petals in equal amount in a glassful of water for 20-30 minutes. Strain it and add 1/2 teaspoonful powder of rock candy, let it cool down and drink lukewarm twice a day.

15. Have 1 teaspoon of **licorice root** powder with water in an empty stomach in the morning. This is mentioned as a *Medhya Rasayana* (a mind rejuvenator) in Ayurveda.

HERBS FOR DEPRESSION & ANXIETY

1. *Ashwagandha* or *Withania somnifera* can very effectively solve problems like manic depression, anxiety disorders, mood phobias etc.

2. *Brahmi* or *Bacopa monnieri* is a nervine tonic that enhances mental ability. It calms and soothes the mind.

3. *Jatamansi* or *Nardostachys jatamansi* eliminates depressive and negative thoughts. It channelizes the mind towards positivism and calms the mind.

4. *Guggulu* or *Commiphora mukul* contains a special mind calming chemical called guggulsterones. This chemical can effectively relieve depression.

5. Turmeric or *Curcuma longa* can treat depression caused from seasonal changes.

YOGA FOR DEPRESSION & ANXIETY

Engage in *yoga* exercises to strengthen the mind and body. This keeps the channels of the body clean and allows proper flow of mental energy and nutrients. *Praanayama* and yoga must become an important part of

a person's daily routine. This helps to concentrate the mind on positive thoughts and a recurrence of depression can be prevented. *Yogic asanas* that are beneficial to people with depression are ***Bhujangasana, Halasana, Paschimottasana, Sarvangasana, Shalabhasana, Shavasana*** and ***Vakrasana***. *Pranayamas yoga* to be done only as per doctor's advice.

Interest in the more subtle *Yoga* practices related to mental health has expanded. Ayurveda offers 5,000 year old tips on lifestyle and stress management, diet, herbs and cleansing and other complementary healing modalities which can help us to balance symptoms of depression. *Yoga* practices reflect to us how we move through the world, thereby addressing our responsibility for managing our wellness and our root dysfunction triggers.

DEPRESSION MANAGEMENT THROUGH PANCHKARMA

All chronic diseases require purification and *Panchakarma* procedures are an effective way to achieve detoxification. Keeping *Vata* and *Pitta* vitiation in mind, *Snehana* or Oleation with medicated *ghee* or oil prior to purification procedures are advised.

Purification procedures like *Virechana* (medicated purgation), *Vamana* (medicated vomiting), *Vasti* (medicated enema) and *Nasya* (nasal administration of medicine) are indicated here.

After doing these purification procedures, *Sirodhara* or pouring of selected medicated oils or buttermilk over scalp is completed. These procedures help in regulating the brain's metabolism and thus regulates the sleep rhythm. Oil massage which is relaxing in nature is beneficial and advised. This procedure stimulates sensory centers spread all over body.

Undigested or partially digested food becomes toxins or *Ama* which disrupts the equilibrium of the body's metabolism. *Ama* formation affects metabolism at every level including brain metabolism and the regulation of sleep. To prevent formation of *Ama*, easily digestible food with *Vata* and *Pitta* pacifying property is used. Specifically buffalo milk is useful for insomnia. Reducing salty and spicy food is also good.

FIGHTING WINTER DEPRESSION WITH AYURVEDA

Winter depression is considered by health experts as one of several Seasonal Affective Disorders or those disorders that develop as part of the body's response to changes in season or outer atmosphere. During winter, one experiences shorter days and longer nights. Meanwhile, the weather becomes chilly such that you have to switch to winter clothing or gears that enable your body to stay warm. As of now, experts are still in search of reasons that would explain why one develops winter depression. However, a few evidences reveal that it could be due to lack of sunlight exposure, although the extent at which this factor cause winter depression to arise still needs to be further examined.

CONCLUSION

Basic concepts of Ayurveda may seem somewhat complex at the outset but become familiar. Ayurveda suggests that *like increases like* and that *a remedy of opposites is beneficial*: If you're cold, get warm. If you are hungry, don't starve yourself - eat! If you're stressed out, avoid more stressors. *Vata dosha* imbalance rules bipolar disorder, depression and mania. Though there are recognizable elements of *pitta* in *mania* and of *kapha* in depression but all mental health issues express at least some *vata*-aggravation. *Vata dosha* manifests as movement, expansion, changeability, instability, coldness, subtlety, dryness, roughness and lightness.

Vata imbalances can manifest as insomnia, fear, changing thoughts and feelings, restlessness, weight loss, tremors, hopelessness and over-stimulation. All these symptoms are ruled by the qualities of air. *Doshas* also rule the seasons and certain times of the day. Use sesame oil or ghee liberally. *Abhyanga* or *ayurvedic* self-massage with warm oil is especially grounding, soothing and nourishing in autumn and for nourishing the spirit when managing depression. Which oils to choose depend on your constitution and current symptoms. Ayurveda considers sleep, food and controlled sex as the three pillars of equilibrium of body humors. A busy modern life requires repair and nourishment to the mind and body through sleep. Ayurveda encourages the consumption of healthy cereals, meat, fruits and vegetables. Different cooking techniques and its impact are also explained. Food should be taken only when we feel hungry. When a person with a good digestive fire eats the right healthy foods, it will be converted in to fine nutrients and nourishes *Ojas* the ultimate factor where our life force is stored. Normal sleep also helps to maintain the quality and quantity of *Ojas*. During good sleep, the brain is nourished and gets refreshed by removing unwanted by products of a stressed brain metabolism. Controlled sex also helps in removing stress. Sex without control results in a loss of *Ojas*.

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