

DEPRESSION

Rob Brabrook's tips for taming the black dog

There's nothing new about depression. Humanity has been suffering depression from early in our evolution.

Hippocrates called it melancholia and Winston Churchill his "black dog".

It is a horribly dark state to be in. It is characterised by loss of energy, lack of motivation, and it is hard to experience pleasure. Instead, emotions such as anxiety, anger, sadness, guilt, shame, humiliation rise to the surface and we feel vulnerable or worthless and withdraw socially.

Depression can find its beginning in childhood if we often felt inferior or worthless as a child. Counselling can determine where these feelings originated and help to dispel the anger and hatred.

When we are depressed there are changes in the way our brain processes our thoughts as mood chemicals are unbalanced. The more we can avoid life's stresses and associated thoughts the less we are sensitive to depression. This is often difficult as our circumstances change constantly.

Negative thoughts about ourselves can amplify body stress response with changes in hormone levels and brain chemicals, and plunge us into depression. Grief from a significant loss can produce feelings of anxiety, exhaustion and defeat. This also places us at the edge of depression. Keep losses in perspective.

WAYS TO TAME THE BLACK DOG

First, have the family doctor check for physical conditions such as

- (A) Thyroid deficiencies
- (B) Anaemia
- (C) Vitamin B12 deficiency
- (D) Hormone Problems
- (E) Mild Stroke
- (F) Reaction to medication.

He may prescribe anti-depressant medication which is non-addictive and may over time provide good relief.

Then, sensibly exercise, reduce alcohol intake, eat a healthy diet. Learn to relax by controlling breathing rhythm, relaxing the muscles one by one.

Make a list of the positive things you would like to include in your life.

Occupy yourself with some activity or hobby you are good at.

Find a counsellor who is understanding and compassionate and is a good reflective listener who will help you to see things in a different light.

Distract dark thoughts by having your mind take a fantasy journey to somewhere beautiful and peaceful.

Cultivate that compassionate side of your nature which reacts warmly to those in pain and distress including your own troubled brain.

Write down your thoughts and then monitor and challenge them to short circuit negative feelings. Realise you are a better person than you thought you were.

Ask yourself 'Am I being falsely accused? Am I attacking myself or calling myself names?'

Develop a strategy to regain control over a difficult situation before feeling defeated or trapped by it.

Black dogs can be tamed!

References various, including "Overcoming Depression" by Paul Gilbert.