

**Question: Are there ways to treat depression other than with drugs?**

**Answer:** Absolutely. Many people would rather not go through their entire lives having to take a drug in order to treat depression. To many people, this just doesn't seem natural. To others, it doesn't really fit their lifestyle or philosophy. To some, it may be too expensive. And then, there are the potential side effects. MedWatch, the Food and Drug Administration's internet site (<http://www.fda.gov/medwatch/safety.htm>), released a report that Paxil in the first trimester of pregnancy increases risk of congenital malformations. They also note on this site that antidepressants increase suicidal thoughts and actions in some children and teenagers. Other side effects of some antidepressants may include insomnia, anxiety, or sexual dysfunction. In my practice, I have seen a combination of Acupuncture and herbs work amazingly well for depression. If these simple techniques work so well, why not also examine lifestyle and diet rather than jump straight to medications? There are times when a medication may be necessary, but in the absence of an emergency, shouldn't the prescription of a medication come only after examining other possible solutions? For example, exercising three to four times per week frequently has a very positive effect on mood. And one of the best things about exercise is that it generates a whole series of *positive* side effects! It can help in decreasing blood pressure and improving cardiovascular function; it can be a social activity, reducing isolation; it can decrease weight; it can help in the control of diabetes and metabolic syndrome; it can improve sleep. And speaking of sleep, how much sleep are you getting? Missing enough sleep will have a negative effect on mood for almost everyone. We're all different, but for most adults, seven to eight hours of sleep will leave you feeling better than five to six. Many people will shake their heads and insist that five or six hours is plenty of sleep for them, but I would argue that these people may have grown accustomed to functioning on this deficient level of sleep; that hardly makes it an optimal lifestyle choice!

What are you eating? Yes, with the pressures of job and family, it can be difficult to eat a balanced diet. But most things worth doing are not easy. Would you rather take a pill or change your food? Refined sugar tastes great, but let's face it, most of us eat too much of it. And eating too much refined sugar frequently leads to a "sugar high" followed by a "sugar low." So gradually decrease your intake of refined sugar. Include deep green leafy vegetables in your diet. Taking a multivitamin can help give your body the building blocks it needs to produce energy (which makes most of us feel good) and to produce the hormones that make us feel happy.

These are simple steps – exercise, sleep, and diet. You can do these things. And simply taking control of your lifestyle may be the most important thing you can do to control depression.