

# Depression

## Information Sheet

Depression is a common experience for many people, ranging from mild to severe. Symptoms of depression may include insomnia or excessive sleeping, weight gain/loss, lethargy and tiredness, anxiety, feeling sad, hopeless or overwhelmed ("It's all just too much"), or perhaps feeling that life just isn't worth living.

Depression has many causes. It may be triggered from something that happens in your life, like the loss of a loved one, overwork and extreme stress. Or it may have a physical cause, perhaps stemming from a biochemical imbalance, mineral deficiency, viral infection or from adrenal exhaustion. There may also be deep seated emotional or psychological reasons for the depression. Whatever the reason, there is much that you can do.



## Yogic Practices for Depression:

For depression, it is good to get the body moving, balance the hormonal system, tone the nervous system, deepen the breath and do some form of relaxation. YogaHealth classes take into account all of the above. Perhaps you could practice an extra class or two at home with a YogaHealth CD, available from your instructor, or you could do some of the following exercises between classes. Keep in mind that a little practice done regularly is better than a lot done occasionally.

The following Yogic exercises and practices are excellent for depression – releasing pent up tension in the muscles, rejuvenating overworked adrenals, balancing the nervous system and hormonal system, and providing a way to help overcome the inertia that can come with depression.

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### 1. Moolabandha combined with paradoxical breathing

- ⇒ Breathe in and float your arms up to land on the floor above your head, then breathe out and float your arms down beside you.
- ⇒ Next time you breathe in and raise the arms, gently tighten the pelvic floor muscles inwards and upwards. Relax the pelvic floor as you breathe out. [If you suffer from incontinence it's better to tighten on the out-breath and relax on the in-breath].
- ⇒ If that's easy, when you breathe in and float your arms up, tighten the pelvic floor and pull the belly in. Relax the belly and the pelvic floor as you breathe out. Repeat 10-20 times.
- ⇒ Relax everything and breathe comfortably.

This practice is extremely beneficial for depression as it stimulates the solar plexus, increases energy in the body, and deepens the breath (increasing oxygen in the blood). It also releases tension in the pelvis and calms the nervous system.

Remember that practicing a little regularly is more useful than a lot occasionally.

### 2. Ujjayi pranayama

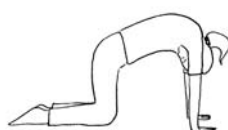
This is a breathing technique where you gently constrict the muscles in the throat to make a very soft snoring sound with the breath in the throat – as if you were breathing in and out through the throat itself. You may find it helps to touch the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth.

Ujjayi is good to practice at night as it helps you sleep. (Insomnia can be a symptom of depression).

Once you are comfortable with this technique, you could combine it with the Moolabandha exercise above, creating the sound in the throat as you raise and lower the arms, and tightening the pelvic floor.

### 3. Cat and Cow

- ⇒ Start on all fours. Breathe in as you lift the head and hips up and arch the spine; breathe out as you lower the head and hips and round the spine.
- ⇒ Alternate between the two postures 10-15 times.
- ⇒ Finish by looking over one shoulder and then the other a few times, then rest back in Yoga Mudra (drop your buttocks onto your feet and rest your forehead on the floor). Moving through Cat and Cow helps to pump the cerebrospinal fluid up the spine and around the brain and greatly helps to tone the nervous system.



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#### 4. Salute to the Sun

This is a dynamic sequence of postures that will really get you moving. Ask your instructor for a 'Salute to the Sun' information sheet.

Keep in mind that this sequence is fairly advanced and for most people it would be best to do a few warm ups first. You might also need to modify some of the exercises initially (you can ask your instructor for guidance here).

#### 5. Spinal twist

This move is very good for rejuvenating stressed out adrenal glands.

- ⇒ Begin lying on your back with the right knee up above the chest and the other leg long. Hold onto the right knee with the right hand and have the left arm out to the side.
- ⇒ Slowly take the right knee down to the right with the right hand, come back to centre and swap hands over, and then take the right knee over to the left with the left hand. Continue side to side like that. Ideally, keep the shoulder blades on the floor – having the arm out level with the shoulder will help to stabilize the shoulders.
- ⇒ For a more complete spinal twist, you could roll your head the opposite way to the knee.
- ⇒ If it's easy for you, you could hold the knee to the left and breathe into the belly or practice Breath of Fire. Swap sides.



#### 6. Yoga Nidra

This is a relaxation technique in which your attention/awareness is directed around different parts of the body. It is actually beneficial for a wide range of problems, because yogic philosophy believes that the roots of all disease lie in the tensions of the mind.

Yoga Nidra is a deep relaxation technique which balances the nervous system. This relaxation is practiced regularly in the YogaHealth classes. If you are interested in doing this at home you could ask your instructor for a Yoga Nidra CD. Or you could practice a basic Yoga Nidra by simply lying with your legs long (Shavasana) or knees standing (Semi Supine position) and taking your attention to different parts of the body while you breathe comfortably.

#### 7. Nutritional Options

You may like to complement your yoga practice with vitamin and mineral supplements. Zinc, Magnesium, L-Tryptophan (this may require a prescription) and Omega 3 fats are said to be beneficial in treating depression. If you feel that a biochemical imbalance has a large part to play in your depression - perhaps because of a history of drug abuse or an extreme vegetarian diet - you could consult a naturopath or biochemical doctor. A fairly accurate picture of your body's biochemistry can be determined by a hair analysis. Ask your doctor or naturopath.

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