

# Treating Depression with Medication

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I have suffered from depression since I was eight years old. I can see the pain on my face in old photographs of myself taken while I was growing up. Over the years, I used mood-altering experiences, such as eating, getting drunk, and falling in love, to ease the pain. Eventually, these experiences stopped working and the depression overwhelmed me. I became suicidal.

When I got into therapy and joined a support group, I felt better. As I worked through childhood issues, began to love myself, and found the joy of spirituality, the pain eased and I thought I would never be depressed again.

Then, in 1990, I was struck down with a debilitating depression. It came out of nowhere. I didn't understand it at first, but every day when I woke up in the morning I cried because I didn't want to face the day. I didn't know what was happening.

I went back to therapy and tried to do more grief work. I continued my reparenting. I also pushed myself to go to my support group and to show up at work. The depression grew worse, and eventually the pain was so bad that I wanted to die. I was tired all the time because I couldn't sleep. My appetite went away, and I lost a lot of weight. Eventually, my body was under so much stress that I broke out in hives. I was covered with huge welts. The hives worsened and my eyes and lips became hideously swollen. Then the histamine under my skin turned bloody. Steroids helped a little, but nothing took away the problem.

Eventually, I collapsed from all of the stress and my doctor sent me to see a psychopharmacologist--a psychiatrist who approaches emotional disorders with drugs to correct abnormal or faulty body chemistry. I remember getting a minor traffic ticket while driving to his office. I started crying and couldn't stop. When I arrived at the therapist's office I was a mess.

I was prepared to talk about my problems with this new therapist. However, he didn't want to hear the story of my life; he just wanted to ask me some questions. I answered them and he looked at me with great tenderness in his eyes. He said, "Susan, I believe your problem is chemical. I don't think talk therapy is going to help you this time."

The doctor then gave me an article about clinical depression. I resisted the idea of being clinically depressed, although my family had a history of this problem. I absolutely did not want to take medication because both my mother and sister had become addicted to narcotics prescribed by a doctor. (Later I learned that they had become addicted to painkillers in an attempt to mask their depression.)

Because I was afraid of medication, I suffered for a few more weeks. Then, one day I couldn't stand it anymore. With tears in my eyes, I called my doctor and agreed to give the medication a try.

If the medication had not worked so quickly, I would have suspected that my condition had improved on its own without intervention. However, within days of taking the medication, I was sleeping through the night. The hives disappeared and I came alive again. I was not high, I just felt good because my body was not in so much pain. And I was ready to go back to growing and changing.

Today, I understand depression in all its many forms, and I realize that different kinds of depression require different treatments. I also understand that depression is the enemy of change and must be worked through in one way or another.

When I am depressed because of a particular situation, like my daughter's death, I tough it out and let time work its magic. But when I cannot function for months and seem to getting worse, I to the the doctor and ask for help. I also read *The Noonday Demon* and stopped being ashamed.