



Understanding Depression with an Unconventional Description

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Frequently I hear individuals talk about being "depressed" and wonder if we this has become a term that is easy to use but not really understood. Depression is much more than having a bad day or feeling sad.

There are many, many different types of depression. It can be associated with various illnesses, addictions or seasons. Some individuals experience situational depression which is triggered by an event but resolved in a healthy manner over time.

On the other hand, chemical depression can have more severe symptoms that last for months, years or even throughout a lifetime. This type often runs in families.

My apologies to all psychiatrists as I describe a very complex disorder in simple terms.

Each of us has billions of nerve cells throughout the body. Between them are coulees or gaps called synapses. Imagine the gaps as being Olympic swimming pools with two gold medal swimmers or neurotransmitters - serotonin and norepinephrine (Sarah and Nora). These are mood stabilizers that help you to cope with stress and function in a healthy manner.

Electrical messages need to travel from one nerve cell to another in order for the body to work properly. They cannot jump the coulees so need to ride on the backs of Sarah and Nora in order to cross the pool and stabilize mood. The more laps these two girls make, the more tired they become and the less effective they will be.

This concept is similar to having "dirty oil" in your car. The oil keeps everything working properly but, the more miles you drive, the less effective your oil becomes. You can change the oil in your car, but you can't change the neurotransmitters in your head.

Whenever you experience a great deal of stress, Sarah and Nora swim more laps. In fact, if you are having sleep difficulties, they are that much more overworked and, as they wear down, the result can be what we call depression. Complex Grief situations, Seasonal Affective Disorder and Major Depressive or Bipolar Disorders can be resulting diagnoses.

There are two primary forms of treatment for depression - medication (a power drink for Sarah and Nora) and therapy (Olympic coaching for the girls). Those who take medication without therapy may find relief as long as they are taking the prescription but then regress when they stop taking it if they haven't learned new ways of coping with stress.

Those who take therapy without medication may have difficulties focussing during sessions or forget the strategies before being able to apply them at a personal level.

The research claims that medication and therapy together provide the most effective treatment for depression.

Clinical Psychologists are trained to help individuals who have thought or mood disorders. If you have further questions or would like to work with someone to develop strategies for treating your depression, consider talking with a psychologist who specializes in this field of practice.

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