

June 2016 Newsletter



At least 3 non-pharmaceutical antidepressant tools are modeled above by our friends in Portland's Forest Park: outdoor exercise, natural light exposure, and electronic-free social networking.

Real Medicine for the mind

We talk a lot about effective approaches to fighting type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and cancer, but rarely focus on depression and anxiety, both of which are surprisingly common. However, both also benefit from the same lifestyle approaches recommended for – you guessed it – diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Patients with depression or anxiety often expect a pharmaceutical solution because of the cultural perception that it is the *only* answer. There are times medications can work miracles, but in many cases a non-pharmaceutical evidence-based approach that harnesses the powerful benefits of good food, exercise, sleep, and light can improve brain chemistry along with overall health. Also, practical stress-management and problem-solving strategies that take into account our personal situation can help reframe our approach to real-world challenges and open up a whole new “toolbox” of solutions. Happily, these natural solutions have no bad side effects and no warning inserts!

To practice “real medicine” is to use *every* available and reasonable tool, both conventional and unconventional, to resolve health problems. Treatments with the most evidence for the *best* potential long term outcomes and the *least* risk should be explored first, which usually means that the emphasis must be on lifestyle choices. (Read Denise’s story further on to see how she put this real medicine approach into practice.)

How to treat depression and anxiety

First, look for treatable causes. Eating and sleeping poorly, medication side effects, and health issues like thyroid disease, vitamin deficiencies, and low iron levels are common triggers that need to be ruled out.

Then, employ as many of the following non-pharmaceutical alternatives as you can. Many prefer to avoid pharmaceutical options because they haven’t worked, side effects are a problem, or there’s concern with long-term use. Some look for treatments with a broader range of benefits than drugs can offer, or wish to improve the effectiveness of medical therapy.

Good mood, great medicine: 7 tools

These non-pharmaceutical options are often *as effective as medications* and can be used at the same time:

- 1. Whole food – the most powerful prescription!**
Unless we feed our minds with the right food we are overlooking the most potent and foundational medicine of all. The Mediterranean diet in particular has a profound effect on mental health both in observational studies and randomized controlled trials. A 2015 study randomized young healthy adults to either “normal” or Mediterranean diets; the Mediterranean group showed significant improvement in contentment, alertness, and cognition in only 10 days!¹
- 2. . . . and eat more of the specific whole foods that have been shown to reduce depression and anxiety,** such as extra-virgin olive oil, oil-rich fish, red meat, probiotic foods, whole grains, vegetables and whole fruit, caffeine, and moderate alcohol.
- 3. Avoid foods that increase the risk of depression.** These are also foods we turn to for comfort and convenience; the main culprits appear to be sugars and refined grains, such as ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, foods made with white flour (most breads, pasta, crackers and pastries), and white rice.²
- 4. Consider a healthy weight loss program.** Weight loss for those who are overweight improves mood as much as cognitive-behavioural therapy.³
- 5. Exhaustion can masquerade as depression, so get an adequate daily dose of sleep,** about 7–9 hours. This may mean cutting back on screen time, a step

¹ Lee, J. et al. Nutrition 2015;31:647-52

² Haghghatdoost, F. et al. Am J Clin Nutr 2016;103:201-9

³ Linde, J.A. et al. Annals Behav Med 2011;41:119-30

which will also help improve our mental outlook; too much time in front of a TV or computer is an independent risk factor for depression.

6. **Daily exercise** can significantly reduce depression and anxiety – especially when outdoors in daylight and vigorous enough to get short of breath and sweaty. In head-to-head studies this appears to be as effective as medications or psychotherapy!^{4,5}
7. **Explore your stress management toolbox.** Stress is a natural by-product of life; for some of us the best stress reducers include making healthy relationships with family and friends a priority, volunteer work, and trying to keep expectations reasonable.

How Denise defeated depression with diet

This 40-year-old active mother with a strong family history of obesity was 215 pounds and struggled with fatigue, headaches, and depression. After her evaluation with us she began following a whole food diet, eating more vegetables, protein, and good fat while cutting back on juices, smoothies, rice, pasta, potatoes, bread, breakfast cereals, and desserts. Within just 1 month Denise lost almost 8 pounds, and 4 months later she was down another 20 pounds. After 2 years she had lost a total of *68 pounds!* She felt terrific, was able to stop her medications, and remained at a healthy weight 3 years later. Real medicine in action!

More tools for keeping on the sunny side

To discuss specific lifestyle tools like vitamin D and light therapy we suggest scheduling a consultation.

- **Vitamin D** seems to act like an antidepressant, and our favorite source is non-burning sunlight exposure. Not only for depression, either – people in high latitudes (like Portland) who actively seek sunlight actually live longer!⁶ Expose as much skin – *without* sunscreen – as is reasonable for 10-20 minutes on sunny days. Oil-rich fish like salmon or sardines, good old fashioned cod liver oil, and vitamin D supplements may also help.
- **Bright light therapy** for Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a tool that can give results equivalent to antidepressant medications.⁷ A technique called “dawn simulation” can also be helpful with SAD.
- Our **One-Year Health Transformation Program** might be helpful for complex health issues – a single flat fee for a year of intensive lifestyle medicine with education, accountability, and follow-up resources to help make healthy change permanent.

⁴ Cooney, G.M. et al. Cochrane Collaboration 2013

⁵ Cooney, G. et al. JAMA 2014;311:2432-3

⁶ Lindqvist, P.G. et al. J Intern Med doi:10.1111/joim.12496

⁷ Lam, R. et al. JAMA Psych 2016;73:56-63

Good Food, Great Medicine classes

The two-part class series targets weight loss, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes, and details steps for preventing or reversing them. The classes are based on the 3rd edition of *Good Food, Great Medicine*, which each participant will receive at the first class.

Good Food, Great Medicine class (part 1):

- Review inter-relationship of excess waistline and weight, insulin resistance (common to most cases of type 2 diabetes), and common chronic diseases.
- Discuss the role of the “key four” – a whole food Mediterranean diet; minimal sweeteners, refined grains and starches; daily activity; and enough sleep.
- Work through the 14 simple steps that target your risk factors and produce effective, lasting change in your waistline, blood sugar, and other health risks.

Good Food, Great Medicine class (part 2):

- Explore practical application of whole food choices and menu planning. See demonstrations of a couple of foundational recipes from *Good Food, Great Medicine*. Review progress, find solutions to challenges, and fine-tune personal action plans.

“In 5 weeks I’ve lost 4 pounds and 1 inch around my waist, lowered my triglycerides and blood sugar, and raised my HDL (good) cholesterol from 31 to 44.”
“Proactive, practical, applicable information. . .”

Time:	6 – 8 pm Tuesday
Dates:	7/20/16 (Part 1) and 7/27/16 (Part 2)
Location:	Providence St. Vincent Medical Center
Cost:	\$100 (2-class series)
Registration:	Call 503.291.1777 to reserve a spot

Dr. Hassell’s speaking events

6/3/2016 – Willamette Valley Country Club: *Good Food is Great Medicine: Which Diet and Lifestyle Choices Really Matter?* Canby, OR. Members only event. <http://www.willamettevalleycc.com>

7/13/2016 – Powell’s City of Books - 1005 W Burnside - 7:30pm: Dr. Hassell will be discussing the health benefits of eating oil-rich fish along with local author, [Diane Morgan](#), who will be discussing her newest book - *Salmon: Everything You Need to Know + 50 Recipes*. Portland, OR. <http://bit.ly/1UycCHM>

7/20/2016 and 7/27/2016 – Good Food, Great Medicine 2-part Lifestyle Change Class Series: Portland, OR. For registration information call our office at 503.291.1777.

Sign up for this free monthly medical + lifestyle newsletter at GoodFoodGreatMedicine.com

“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21 (KJV)