



e-quilibrium

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Depression

Depression is bad for your health. Nearly as bad as smoking according to data from a Norwegian study of over 60,000 adults, published in 2009 in the British Journal of Psychiatry. Over a five-year period, self-reported depression was associated with a similar risk of dying from any cause as was smoking. Furthermore, the relationship between depression and mortality in this study was only slightly reduced when the contribution of the following factors was considered: smoking, alcohol use, socioeconomic status and educational level, blood pressure, cholesterol level, and body mass index.

That depression is associated with poorer physical health is not news. It is well established that the presence of depression is associated with increased risk for diabetes and coronary heart disease, and the presence of depression contributes to poorer outcomes with both of these chronic illnesses. Obviously, there is the risk of suicide with depression, but the mortality risks associated with depression are far beyond deaths attributed to suicide.

Depression is eminently treatable. Many individuals find antidepressant medication to be beneficial. There is also much evidence for the effectiveness of psychotherapy. One form of psychotherapy known to be effective for depression is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT involves homework for the individual. Not surprisingly, clients who are most willing to do homework benefit the most. Additionally, many of the strategies that are used in CBT for depression generally promote health, well being, and resilience. One doesn't have to be depressed to benefit from them. A behavioral example is

exercise. Getting regular exercise has been shown to have an antidepressant effect, along with the numerous other health benefits of physical activity. A cognitive strategy used in CBT is disputing negative thoughts.

In previous editions of **e-equilibrium**, I have described two evident patterns in human thinking. One is the bias toward information that confirms what one already believes. A second is that negative emotional states (including depression) tend to narrow attention and perspective. Taken together, these patterns reinforce the negative thoughts of depression. If I think that I am worthless I will tend to be biased toward evidence supporting this belief... which contributes to me feeling more depressed, which further narrows my attention on additional confirming evidence, and so forth. Disputing negative thoughts is a strategy aimed at countering these patterns. "What evidence is there that doesn't support my belief?" "What's another way to look at this situation?" "My thought/belief can't be 100% accurate because of these facts or observations." "If I took this belief to court, what evidence would the opposing attorney use to dispute the belief?" Seeing and appreciating other points of view is typically useful in many areas of life.

Of course, depression can vary widely in its severity, complexity, and response to treatment. However, there are health practices that can be effective components to preventing or managing depression. These include regular physical activity and disputing negative thoughts. Such practices are good for emotional and physical health!

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