

# *Life Transitions Newsletter*

*November 2007*



*Dear Clients,*

*It is my sincere hope that all of you have recovered from the fires. It has been an eventful three weeks!*

*This newsletter is devoted to the latest advancements/research on depression and preparing for the holidays.*

*Sincerely,  
Penny Blazej, LCSW, BCD*

## *Is depression biological or environmental?*

As most of you know, depression is a big health issue. Many experts put it in the top 5 medical issues and it is rising.

So what real is the cause for depression? Is it biological or environmental? The answer is both. It does “run” in families so many experts believe that there is a biological component to depression. Yes, there are biological components to depression that lead to chemical imbalances in the brain. Many refer to depression as a disease; it even has a “code” in the DMSIV (medical bible of psychiatrists).

However, your environment also plays an equal, and some experts say greater a role in depression. Environmental factors like work, family, friends and community strongly contribute to mental health. The fires are a case in point. One moment life is going well and the next you find yourself evacuated and possibly losing your home. Or how about the trauma of going through a divorce? Or facing the death of a loved one. Any one of these stressors, if not addressed, can lead to a clinical depression.

Hence, the answer to the question is that depression has not only a strong biological factor but equally important it has key environmental factors as well.

To treat depression just with medication without addressing the environmental factors that have contributed to the depression is only treating part of the condition. Numerous clinical studies have conclude the same thing, stating that patients who treat their depression with BOTH antidepressants and psychotherapy have a much higher cure rate and lower risk to having the depression return.

The best treatments for depression have been Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Hypnosis. What CBT does is allow you to look and think about your world from a more positive perspective. How we think directly affects our mood and mental health. Changing from negative thoughts to more positive ones causes a significant shift in brain chemistry. That shift can reduce symptoms of depression. Hypnosis is used to reinforce those “thinking” changes.

Dr. Michael Yapko is a world leading expert in the area of depression. You can read about the latest developments and treatments at his website:

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[www.acu.edu.au/yapko](http://www.acu.edu.au/yapko)

## *Which is better an antidepressant or exercise?*

Duke University Study concludes that exercise is as good or better than taking antidepressants.

More than 200 adults diagnosed with major depressive disorder (MDD) were divided them into four groups:

- 1) Supervised group exercise
- 2) Home-based exercise
- 3) Zoloft
- 4) Placebo pill

The results were that **group** exercise (individual exercise had lower success rate) had nearly the same results as the group taking a leading antidepressant drug.

For more information on this study go to:  
<http://www.hsibaltimore.com/ealerts/ea200204/ea20020422.html>

The key here is that “group” exercise provided better results. One possible explanation is that the group provided needed socialization. As many of you know one of the symptoms of depression is isolation which leads to deeper depression.

So will exercise replace antidepressants? The answer is no. Most people who are depressed have little if any motivation especially when it comes to starting a new habit that needs to be done daily if it is going to be effective. Antidepressants may be needed to help a person feel well enough to start exercising.

In my practice, I have found those who exercise regularly generally need to take lower doses of antidepressants.

## *How do you stay relaxed during these holidays?*

Many of you are most likely feeling the increase of stress as holidays approach. Here are a few tips for keeping your stress down. First, focus on the meaning of the holiday and resist being pulled into its commercialization. Secondly, keep your family expectations realistic. For example, if you have always had difficulty with a relative, the holidays are not the time to solve this relationship problem. Thirdly, it is OK to give IOUs for presents or how about giving a family an evening event to the theater. Lastly, take extra care of yourself: eat healthy foods, get enough sleep, don't overbook yourself, exercise and do relaxation exercises regularly.

The October edition of Kaiser's Health newsletter featured ten ways to relax and they give you “how to” instructions. These are:

1. Everyday relaxation
2. Six-second mini-relaxation
3. Breathing exercises
4. Muscle relaxation
5. Mindfulness
6. Affirmations
7. Self-hypnosis
8. Autogenic training
9. Guided imagery and visualization
10. Imagine yourself well

For more information go to their website:

[http://members.kaiserpermanente.org/kpweb/detailPage.do?cfe=286&html=/htmlapp/feature/286mindbody/nat\\_relax\\_imagery\\_how\\_to.html&rop=SCA](http://members.kaiserpermanente.org/kpweb/detailPage.do?cfe=286&html=/htmlapp/feature/286mindbody/nat_relax_imagery_how_to.html&rop=SCA)

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!**