

**Excerpt taken from [Clean: The Revolutionary Program to Restore the Body's Natural Ability to Heal Itself](#) by Dr Alejandro Junger MD.**

Publisher: HarperOne (May 12, 2009)

# Depression

Thirty-year old Kate had been feeling increasingly depressed. She had consulted a psychiatrist who told her (in an echo of my own case) she had a “chemical imbalance.” She was prescribed Zoloft and when small doses didn’t help her mood, she was increased to maximum dose. This high dose upset Kate, who mentioned she felt uncomfortable taking medication for her sadness at all—but at least the pain in her heart and the anxiety that made breathing difficult at times had subsided. It was a secondary, but equally upsetting, problem that had brought her to me. She had gained 25 pounds while on the medication, and the shame about that was starting to be as painful as the sadness that the Zoloft had improved.

I told Kate that Zoloft is part of a group of drugs called SSRIs, or Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors. They are designed to help with low serotonin levels—not by increasing the amount produced, but by letting the amounts available in the body stick around longer before inactivated. While they can be very beneficial in cases of moderate depression to kick start her to a more stable place, they can sometimes mask the real problem: something in the factory of the gut, where the majority of the serotonin is produced, has gone awry. Instead of relying forever on an outside source of something she is designed by nature to make herself, we want to correct whatever obstacles and lacks are causing her to under produce the neurotransmitter. In addition, I told her that one of the most common issues I see amongst women her age is a sluggish thyroid gland, due to mental stress, allergies, and nutritional lacks. This influences both weight gain and depression. By giving her body a recharge and a “reset” through a cleanse, the

inner serotonin production gets a chance to improve and the thyroid can bounce back into full action, helping to regulate weight again. Kate ended up doing six weeks of Clean, because she was feeling so great that she didn't want to change anything. In total she lost 30 pounds and she looked better than ever. I worked in conjunction with her psychiatrist and slowly tapered her off her Zoloft .

When your intestinal environment is damaged and inflamed, there is a slow reduction of natural serotonin levels, because so much of your serotonin is made in the intestines under the right conditions. When this happens, it physically changes the way you are getting signals about what to feel and how to respond to the world. Your experiences of moods and feelings will change for the worse, shifting to apathy, a dulled anaesthetized state, or serious lows. This explanation could be seen as a modern scientific understanding of amma's torpor of the spirit. Both are caused by toxicity.

As anyone with a more complex understanding of the psyche and the physiology knows, the picture of depression is far more intricate than this. For one thing, there are many other neurotransmitters involved that may also be out of balance, whether from nutritional lacks or subtler imbalances in other parts of the body. Then add to this the quantum toxins, all the problems of the heart and soul that evades a physical examination, and it is impossible to say that there is ever a single cause of depression . I would never have tried to tell Kate if the root of her suffering started in the body (with low neurotransmitters causing her low spirits) or in the spirit (with her spirit generating a physical symptom to get her attention). But serotonin levels are something we can optimize easily just in case, and work with that. Time and time again, I've witnessed how restoring the intestinal integrity reactivates the major serotonin factory in the guts, and the mental fog, sadness, or distress melt away. This can be the massive first step to improvement from which real healing in the spirit can start. Frequently, as Kate experienced, the patient who is already on anti-depressant medication is able to reduce

the dosage and often remove it entirely. (This should always be done while working with the physician who prescribed them and never on your own.)

Antidepressants, when used consciously, can serve an important purpose. In cases of moderate or severe depression they can be the “bridge” that helps shift the patient from a place where they are floundering to a place where they feel some solid ground. Like any drug, they will need to be neutralized and eliminated by the liver, so they add to the toxic load. But anti-depressants can be a good tool used while repairing the gut flora during and after a detox program. Since the brain is ‘plastic,’ meaning it is always changing and modifying, anti-depressants can help create some new neural pathways through which your experience of the world gets processed. You are creating a new and improved memory of what it’s like to feel better over the few months it might take for your gut flora to get restored and for your second brain to manufacture its own serotonin, reestablishing the pathways to a happier perception of the world.

Because most antidepressants only work for a while, and have a tolerance effect in many people after six months to a year, to treat depression without restoring the conditions in the body is negligent. Often, patients are simply put on higher doses or on second or third antidepressant. To rely on antidepressants as the only course of action long-term is like whipping a weak horse into running. He may run, but he will collapse after a while. Meanwhile the side effects of the medications--from decreased libido, impotence, insomnia, weight gain or weight loss, to dry mouth and more—can accumulate. (The most tragic side effect of all is suicide, which is little discussed in the medical world.) If, however, the patient increases their serotonin naturally, it’s as if we brought a hundred new horses into the race, letting the weak one go out to pasture and enjoy the grass.

**Note:** Serotonin production is greatly influenced by diet. Like every thing in the body, serotonin is built with the building blocks we obtain from food. It uses certain amino

acids as building blocks, especially the one known as tryptophan that comes from high-protein foods. Levels of tryptophan have hugely declined in the modern diet. When we ate wild animals that foraged on grasses and other plants, we got more tryptophan in our diets. Grain-fed animals have much less of it, just like they have less omega-3 fatty acids. In addition, the natural production of serotonin is inhibited by:

- Caffeine, alcohol, aspartame
- A lack of sunlight
- Lack of exercise

After repairing the damaged intestinal environment, creating a Wellness Plan with a nutrient balanced diet, and possibly a regime of supplements that include probiotics, is an important step in sustaining more stable serotonin levels.

Looking for a structure plan to help you get started on your Wellness Journey? Consider the 21 Day Clean Program Kit

[www.cleanprogram.com](http://www.cleanprogram.com)