Serenity Aberdour, ND

A recent conversation with Edith, an old friend, reminded me that even an ordinarily vivacious and energetic health professional can occasionally have trouble with weight and depression.

Consider carbohydrate intolerance. Malabsorption of carbohydrates, particularly lactose and fructose, has been linked to depression in adults and children. Adults with fructose or lactose intolerance can have significantly higher depression scores than those who properly digest these sugars, and in a study of adolescents with major depression, over 70 percent were found to have sugar intolerance.

Fructose malabsorbers have also been found to have significantly lower blood levels of tryptophan, an amino acid used to make serotonin. Low tryptophan levels may cause low serotonin levels—long thought to play a role in depression.

Will reducing sugars in the diet help? In a study of adults with fructose intolerance, reducing dietary fructose resulted in a 65-percent reduction in depression scores in only four weeks.

Obesity and depression

There is mounting evidence that obesity and depression share a close relationship. Depression early in adolescence has been shown to increase the risk of obesity later on, and men and women who are overweight have been found to be more likely to feel sad or depressed at...
"In a study of adolescents with major depression, over 70 percent were found to have sugar intolerance."

The social stigma attached to being overweight in our society can certainly contribute to depression, but there is more to it than that. Fat tissue can act as an endocrine gland, causing significant changes to hormone and blood sugar balance, which can have a major impact on mood. In turn, depression can change dietary intakes; carbohydrates (especially simple carbohydrates like candy and sugary snacks) help to increase brain serotonin levels, making people feel better.

Some depressed individuals self-medicate with food, which can promote obesity, further contributing to depression.

**Exercise**

Regular exercise can make a world of difference for the depressed. Even a single 30-minute burst of exercise has been shown to improve mood and feelings of well-being in depressed individuals. Exercise has a number of beneficial effects that may ease depression, including balancing blood sugar levels and relieving stress, and it may even raise our serotonin levels. Regular exercise also helps to maintain a healthy body weight, preventing obesity and the adverse effects that it can have on mood.

Many factors can contribute to depression, and weight loss and/or sugar reduction will not be the answer for everyone. Nonetheless, many who struggle with depression may find that such natural interventions provide significant relief and, considering their lack of side effects and the overall health benefits they provide, they are certainly worth a try.

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Serenity Aberdour, ND, is a naturopathic doctor practising in Vancouver, BC. phs-clinic.com