

# ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS



- Most people with depression or anxiety try to manage the illness themselves. Some common strategies like drinking more alcohol or smoking cannabis are clearly unhelpful.
- Other people try alternative therapies or adjusting their life-cycle. Some activities like increased physical activity or attention to sleep patterns are clearly beneficial.
- Herbal remedies and other alternative health practices may be either helpful or harmful.
- Some of these approaches have undergone some reasonable scientific testing and can therefore be tried, especially when the depression is not severe or life-threatening.

**TABLE 1. EVIDENCE-BASE OF DIFFERENT ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR DEPRESSION**

Good Evidence	Some Evidence	Poor Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St John's Wort</li> <li>• Physical exercise</li> <li>• Self-help books involving cognitive behaviour therapy</li> <li>• Light therapy (for winter depression)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Light therapy (for non-seasonal depression)</li> <li>• Massage therapy</li> <li>• Negative air ionisation (for winter depression)</li> <li>• Relaxation therapy</li> <li>• SAME (S-Adenosylmethionine)*</li> <li>• Folate</li> <li>• Yoga breathing exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ginseng</li> <li>• Lemon balm</li> <li>• Painkillers</li> <li>• Vervain<sup>#</sup></li> <li>• Colour therapy</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Chocolate</li> </ul>

\*SAME is an amino acid that occurs naturally in cells. <sup>#</sup> Vervain is a traditional herbal remedy for depression consisting of the aerial parts of a flowering plant. Source: Jorm AF, Christensen H, Griffiths KM, Rodgers B. **Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for depression.** *MJA* 2002; 176 Suppl May 20: p. S84-96.

**TABLE 2. EVIDENCE-BASE OF DIFFERENT ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS FOR ANXIETY**

Good Evidence	Some Evidence	Poor Evidence	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kava</li> <li>• Exercise</li> <li>• Relaxation therapy</li> <li>• Bibliotherapy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acupuncture</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Autogenic training<sup>#</sup></li> <li>• Meditation</li> <li>• Inositol<sup>##</sup></li> <li>• Alcohol avoidance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medicines</li> <li>• Bach flower remedies</li> <li>• Berocca</li> <li>• Ginger</li> <li>• Gotu Kola</li> <li>• Herbal preparations</li> <li>• Homeopathy</li> <li>• Lemongrass</li> <li>• Licorice</li> <li>• Magnesium</li> <li>• Passionflower</li> <li>• St. John's Wort</li> <li>• Valerian</li> <li>• Vitamin C</li> <li>• 5-Hydroxytryptophan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical treatments</li> <li>• Aromatherapy</li> <li>• Hydrotherapy</li> <li>• Massage/ touch therapy</li> <li>• Dance/ movement therapy</li> <li>• Humour</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Yoga</li> <li>• Dietary changes</li> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Caffeine reduction</li> <li>• Carbohydrate rich, protein-poor diet</li> <li>• Nicotine avoidance</li> </ul>

\*The evidence for the alternative treatments in this column pertains to specific types of anxiety disorders ranging from generalised anxiety disorder to obsessive compulsive disorder. <sup>#</sup>Autogenic training is a self-relaxation procedure that is based on passive concentration on bodily perceptions (eg. heaviness and warmth of legs). <sup>##</sup>Inositol is an isomer of glucose and it occurs in the normal human diet with around one gram per day being consumed. Source: Jorm AF, Christensen H, Griffiths KM, Parslow RA, Rodgers B, Blewitt KA. **Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for anxiety disorders.** *MJA* (in press).

## MORE INFORMATION

**Bluepages** [<http://bluepages.anu.edu.au/whatworks.html>]

Visit the Bluepages website for more information about alternative treatments.

'Effectiveness of complementary and self-help treatments for depression' - Medical Journal of Australia (2002) – [[http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/176\\_10\\_200502/jor10311\\_fm.html](http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/176_10_200502/jor10311_fm.html)]

Jorm and colleagues review the effectiveness of alternative treatments for depression. To find out more detail about these alternative treatments, download this article.

Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety:

**Coping strategies** [[http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=1.14](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=1.14)]

**beyondblue fact sheet - Cognitive and other psychological therapies**

**beyondblue fact sheet - Why do I need to take antidepressant drugs?**