

Alternatives, including something as simple as support, can help overcome depression, **LES ZIGOMANIS** writes

Sharing in the coping

I took me 20 years to learn that medication isn't the only way to treat neurosis. That's the option many doctors employ.

Can't sleep? Take a sleeping tablet. Anxious? Try a sedative. Down? Start a course of anti-depressants.

There's a pharmaceutical answer for pretty much any problem.

I don't know if these are actually solutions, though. Medications should be used as temporary support, to offer breathing room, while the sufferer finds other ways to deal with their problems.

However, there are other alternatives.

Something I found of invaluable assistance is cognitive behavioural therapy – challenging and modifying faulty thought processes.

This is much easier than it sounds, and simply involves talking and reasoning your way through problems.

If you had a friend who was down, you'd talk them through it. Now do it with yourself. Diet is also something that plays a factor. I used to be a binge eater. Instead of three meals a day, I'd have a light breakfast, survive the rest of the day on caffeine, and then have a huge meal for dinner. I learned much later that when we binge it's like producing a high, and given that's the case we have further to fall.

Instead, the sensible option is to avoid those highs by having four or five lighter meals a day.

Something else which helps immeasurably is exercise.

Researchers at Duke University studied people suffering from depression for four months. They found that 60 per cent of those people who exercised for 30 minutes, three times a week, overcame their depression without the need for anti-depressants.

Lastly, there's a factor as simple as support. I grew up in a time where problems like depression, anxiety, and OCD, were considered taboo – although I think now, 20 years later, little has changed.

I kept things to myself, afraid what people would think of me. Talking helps. Externalizing problems, discussing them with people who can offer fresh and constructive advice helps to put everything into perspective. I look at this stuff now and think, Who cares? I don't mean to be flippant, or come across as a crusader, but it's taken me almost 25 years to realise it's nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, it's me. It's no different to if I was a diabetic, or had to wear glasses, or whatever the case might be. It's part of what makes me the person I am. In fact, it makes me, me.

■ Les Zigomanis is studying professional writing and editing at NMIT.



Les Zigomanis is sharing his experience with depression and how to live with it.

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