

The Great Depression

WHETHER YOU'RE DOWN FOR THE COUNT OR JUST TEMPORARILY DOWN AND OUT, THE CHOICE TO GET BETTER IS YOURS **By Belisa Vranich, Psy.D.**

I was angry, bitter, hateful, and mean-spirited. I was drinking a lot. I felt like I was in the bottom of a pit with no escape in sight." So admits NFL Hall-of-Famer Terry Bradshaw of his struggle with chronic depression. "I'd just gone through a painful divorce," Bradshaw remembers, "and it didn't seem like there was any way that my life could get better." The unfortunate thing about Bradshaw's story: There are an estimated 19 million men and women just like him throughout America.

A Male Epidemic

"Women tend to tell their friends and doctor when they aren't feeling well," says Bob Barcus, Ph.D., clinical director of the Yellow Springs Psychological Center in Ohio, "which helps us to figure out when they're depressed. Men, on the other hand, bottle up their emotions and hold things in, making it much harder to spot potential problems."

Everyone Is at Risk

"What a lot of men don't understand about depression is that it's nothing you're doing wrong or that you should feel shame over," says Bradshaw. "When you're clinically depressed, all it means is that the chemicals in your brain are out of

balance. It's a problem you can't control."

As anyone who takes a breath each day knows, Bradshaw is far from alone when it comes to depression. The average American reports feeling down three days a month. But if sadness is a normal part of the human condition, how can you tell if you really have a problem? Barcus advises keeping an eye out for changes in appetite or sleep patterns, irritability, anger, pessimism, indifference, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, unexplained aches and pains, and signs of social withdrawal. If you're thinking about death, or if you're just unable to find pleasure in the things you used to love—say, sex—then it's probably time to ask for help.

BRADSHAW:
You'd never
know he just
scored.

Hope on the Horizon

The good news: "Treatment works, and it works well," says Mike Faenza, president of the National Mental Health Association. "Eighty percent of people who seek treatment recover from their depression completely." Drugs are one option for regaining control, but you can also: **Eliminate negative-thinking patterns.** The blues plague the Trumps and Richard Bransons of the world with just as much vigor as they do blue-collar folk—if not more so. When you set very specific, lofty goals, you either succeed or fail, and both can be very tough on your psyche. So work to lose 10 pounds, not 100. Write that novel, but don't expect to become a bestselling author.

Try an herbal remedy. St. John's wort can help. Try doses of 900 mg for the short-term treatment of mild depression. Also try Sam-E, an amino acid that was recently shown to have similar mood-boosting properties.

Deal with daily stressors. While you can't necessarily solve every problem, you can pinpoint things that have accumulated over time and are taking a toll on the quality of your life.

Shoot for 8, 8, and 20. Eight hours of sleep, 8 glasses of water, and at least 20 minutes of direct face-to-sky contact with the sun each day. Get less of any of the three and you'll increase your depression risk.

Hit the gym. Exercise increases serotonin production and causes more of that

depression-fighting hormone to be taken up into the brain. Duke University research showed that just eight minutes of exercise can dramatically reduce depression symptoms.

As for Bradshaw . . . "I take medication to keep the proper balance of chemicals in my body, and they work. I'm never going back into that black hole again. Don't get me wrong—I'm still a dick. I'm just a happy dick."

For help finding treatment for clinical depression, contact the National Institute of Mental Health's "Real Men, Real Depression" campaign office at 866.227.6464, or log on to their Web site: menanddepression.nimh.nih.gov.

SLY ON...

DEPRESSION

What does depression look like? Where does it live? Where does it go? How can I kill it?

So many questions, so few answers. Like everything on this daffy, morose planet, there are different levels of every ailment, just as there are a million different ways to **get** the blues. And unless you're either insane or in utter denial, you're going to journey through life's peaks and valleys.

If you're feeling worthless, if living has lost its pleasure, if you're irritable, if you want to stay in bed and not deal with things, if your body aches—you've got to stop retreating and take the offensive. Only **you** can fight the war raging inside. What I've resorted to in times of need has been a "Top 10" list I try to live by until the storm passes:

1. Don't be afraid.
2. Be in control.
3. If people don't appreciate you, appreciate yourself.
4. If you have anger, talk about it **calmly**.
5. Watch comedies.
6. Realize **everyone** goes through what you're going through.
7. Get up and move. Staying put makes things worse.
8. Change your pattern—call somebody you haven't talked to for a long time.
9. Keep saying, "I will feel better tomorrow"—every night.
10. Your mind is like a computer—you have to program it with positive feelings, because it's **impossible** to have positive thoughts and negative thoughts at the same time. —S.S.