

Rebuild from Depression

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Chapter 16: Conclusion

Every generation in every era has social movements that respond to the crisis of the day. The women of my great grandmother's generation fought for suffrage; my grandmother's generation fought against the global aspirations of the Nazi party; and my mother's generation fought against the war in Vietnam.

In 2030 as we look back on the early part of the 21st century, we will reflect on social movements advocating for natural foods grown locally, without the use of herbicides and pesticides, without genetic modifications. Along with these important movements, which in themselves will help us rebuild from depression, the time is here for us to be proactive about depression itself.

The Year 2030

The World Health Organization (WHO) predicts that in less than a quarter of a century, depression will be the second-greatest cause of *Disability Adjusted Life Years* (DALYs) – years lost from our work, from our families, from our lives due to depression. This forecast in itself is discouraging. We have already lost too many years to depression. But with the tools in this book, we have set out to reduce the number of days we lose to depression and to help our children gain and maintain their health. As we do this, we need to realize that the World Health Organization forecast is based on an assumption that depression researchers know to be incorrect. This assumption leads the 2030 forecast to *underestimate* depression forecasts for 2030.

The WHO's forecast for years lost to depression is likely far lower than the amount of time depression will steal from us in 2030

should trends continue. We will likely have more years lost due to early death from suicide. We will likely have more years lost due simply to being unable to function – to being in institutions, to being at home with the drapes closed, avoiding contact with the outside world.

The forecast model developed by the WHO assumes that rates of depression will remain constant over time. It assumes that a sixty-year-old woman here in the U.S. in 2030 will suffer at the same rate as a sixty-year-old woman in 2002. The model assumes that economic circumstances will change, global distribution of people will change, and those changes will impact rates of disease overall. But research suggests that a sixty-year-old woman in 2030 is likely to suffer *much more* from depression than a sixty-year-old in 2002, not less. Depression rates are *increasing*, not remaining constant.

As we discussed in Chapter 10, each new generation of Americans is increasingly likely to suffer from depression. We saw that women currently in their 60s (my mother's age) have lost an average of 15% of their lives to depression – about nine years. Women in my generation, approaching forty, have lost nearly one-third of their lives to depression, also about nine years. Women my age have lived half as many years as women my mother's age and yet we have lost as many years of our lives to depression as our mothers have.

Furthermore, we know that nutritional deficiencies are associated with other diseases as well as with depression. Depressed people are more likely to develop heart disease, possibly because of the Omega-3 fatty acid deficiency well documented in both diseases. So not only are we likely to struggle with many more years of depression, but we will increasingly fight other diseases as well.

And all of this is to say that if we do not do something to alleviate our own depression and to help our children, their children, our parents, and our husbands, 2030 will be a very bad year. It will be far worse than data analysts at the WHO suggest to us.

If we do not make changes, the decades leading up to 2030 will be filled with longer depressive slumps and shorter periods of functional days. The younger generations in our families are likely to struggle even more.

We do not often celebrate birthdays in this family, but we will be having a very big birthday party in 2030. I will turn 61 that year and I will be the age of my grandmother when she died of complications from postpartum depression. As I have mentioned, her depression started in her years as a young mother and stole decades of life from her as she struggled to raise her children. Her children became teenagers and then adults as she struggled with depression, developed diabetes and heart disease, and died of a stroke at the age of 61.

Depression should have been her wake-up call but she did not realize its association with nutrition. She did not realize that with nutrient deficiencies left unchecked, her body would fall victim to other diseases. Instead she was left to suffer for many years and she never had the quality of life that we all deserve.

So 2030 will be an important year for me and for all of us. Decades full of days between now and then will help us change the trend of ever-increasing years lost to depression.

You and I have tools to improve our nutrition and our lifestyles so that every day we wake up, our own likelihood of depression is lower than it would have been otherwise. Every day we wake up, the severity of our depression will be less than it would have been otherwise.

What We Know

Unlike my grandmother's generation, we can at least take the edge off of depression with the knowledge that we have. We know a great deal:

- Nutrients matter. Deficiencies can make us depressed.

- Supplementing some dietary nutrients ease depression in clinical trials.
- We know how to ask our doctors to test for nutrient deficiencies.
- We can shop for food supplements using current research
- We can select and prepare our food so that we are getting more of our meals.

We have many tools and we need to begin, slowly, to implement them starting today.

To take on this task of changing depression trend lines, we need to do three things:

1) Spend thirty seconds or less on “what I should have done differently.”

We all reflect on it and there are many decades of bad decisions in our families. My grandmother did not know the impact of her diet choices. My mother cringes over the peanut butter diet of her pregnancy with me. I reflect on the impact of all my fad diets. The rate of depression is increasing so rapidly, in part, because so many of us have made bad decisions. What you can do today (after reflecting for thirty seconds or less on the bad decisions) is to begin to make good decisions.

2) Make one change on every good day.

Depression is insidious, partly because it steals our power. We are overwhelmed and immobilized and cannot see our way clear to change *anything* on bad days. Those bad days are not the days to make changes. We need to leverage the good days to make the bad days less bad. As we have good days, we can implement a small change that will help us on bad days.

- Buy a good kitchen ingredient to replace a bad one. Replace the corn oil with olive or coconut oil and improve your Omega-3 to Omega-6 fatty acid ratio.

- Find a healthier convenience food to replace your least healthy convenience foods.
- Shop at a farmer's market. Find some old-fashioned varieties of produce grown in your area. They are likely to be higher in nutrients.
- Learn to make kefir sodas to replace your regular sodas. You will save money and add B-vitamins to your diet.
- Buy a less-toxic shampoo when your bottle is almost empty.
- Ferment some extra summer squash and, thereby, add enzymes and B-vitamins to your diet.

My website provides “simple change resources” based on nutrient themes for family members, therapists, and doctors to help people who are not up to major life changes.

As you begin to feel better, make small changes at a quicker pace. Make a big change on occasion. None of us will lack the opportunity to make changes between now and 2030. Some of us will make changes at a slower pace than others, but none of us will lack projects. You can follow my changes on my blog.

3) Help your family and friends

Mothers and grandmothers have the power to change a family. We should start with ourselves first. As we have the energy, we can help the rest of the family be more healthy and at lower risk of depression. If you are cooking for a family, those meals can be improved to include more nutrients. All meals can be tweaked – the meal makeovers in Chapter 16 provide some examples. Meals do not have to be complicated or perfect, just better than they would have been. Keep improving them as you are able. Everyone in the household will benefit.

If your children or grandchildren are out of the house, cook them some depression-fighting foods. No one that I know of would begrudge a home-cooked meal. No one has ever turned down or been disappointed by my kefir sodas either.

Help your depressed friends and family see the link between depression and nutrition. Help them identify the nutrients they need. Shop for their supplements or food. A young woman I know is on seven medications for depression and substance abuse. It is her goal to be on just one medication. Her family has helped her by recognizing her need for Omega-3 fatty acids, magnesium, and zinc, providing them for her, and helping her remember to take them. They provided her with the most absorbable form of the minerals, knowing that she would not take them as often as intended. She has a long road ahead of her but has started to make changes with the help of her family. Some day she will be able to make changes for herself.

As your family members and friends feel better, help them begin to make small changes on their good days. Between now and 2030, we will be able to make a powerful number of small changes in our lives. Take it at a pace you can manage, but start today. And may we all be blessed with long lives filled with increasing numbers of good days.