

Rebuild from Depression

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Chapter 1: Introduction

My grandmother died at the age of 61 of complications from postpartum depression.

I know it sounds crazy.

She had postpartum depression back in the 1940s and 1950s, before the condition had a name. She was institutionalized twice after “nervous breakdowns,” was given what my granddad called her “I-don’t-give-a-shit pills,” and she had shock therapy when those pills were not sufficient.

The shock therapy helped her return to her family and function at a basic level, perhaps because it raised her brain levels of zinc. She displayed signs of zinc deficiencies herself -- her very small frame in a family of larger people is one possible indicator. And as she proceeded through life she developed other diseases which, like depression, are associated with low zinc, magnesium, B-vitamins, and Omega-3 fatty acids. She developed Type I diabetes at the age of 50 and she died at the age of 61 “with the heart of an 80-year-old,” according to her cardiologist.

I have spoken to other women about my grandmother and her death from postpartum depression at 61. Most do not think I am crazy at all. Their eyes widen and they say, “my problems started after I had my children.” Diabetes, thyroid disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, and cardiac problems top the list of diseases that these women in my life report to me.

In this context, my grandmother gave up a great deal for her children. Her husband of all those years is still alive in his late 80s and he has only given up his golf game in the last few months.

He was able to keep his nutrient stores to himself all those years. For my grandmother's part, we have celebrated the 25th anniversary of her death by publishing this book.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has a term for these "lost years" of my grandmother's life – disability adjusted life years, or DALYs. These are the years of life lost due to early death or disability. I argue that my grandmother's years lost to early death may be 25, though it is surely hard to know how long she would have lived had she been healthy. Her sisters lived high-quality lives past the age of 90.

But on top of her early death, she lost many more years due to disability caused by depression. From all reports, many of her years between her early 20s and her death at 61 were lost due to disability from depression and its complications. She may have lost closer to 65 years of life from both early death and from health-related disabilities.

Among women in industrialized countries, depression is now the number one cause of disability adjusted life years according to the WHO. I have lost at least three years myself and I am fairly young and have not been plagued by life-long depression. I am lucky in this regard.

But the outlook for babies born now is not good. When my son Frederick is 28 years old in 2030, the World Health Organization projects that depression will be the second-greatest cause of loss of years of life due to early death or loss from disability, *for men and women across the globe*. All those years of depressive hell or a life cut short by suicide will add up. And for the population on this planet, those years lost due to depression will be second only to those lost due to HIV/AIDS.

Years lost due to other diseases will decline and our struggles with depression will continue unchecked. Our children will be affected by debilitating depression and suicide if the World Health Organization forecast is correct. And our generation, too, will

continue to be plagued by the disease *if trends continue as they have*.

Tools to change the trends

In this day, none of us should suffer from a lack of nutrients. And yet, depression studies show that providing patients with vitamin B-12 or folic acid alleviates depression. Surveys of the food intake of American women show that many of us do not eat adequate amounts of folate, magnesium, zinc, B-6, and Omega-3 fatty acids. All of these nutrients (and many others) can cause or aggravate depression if we do not consume enough of them.

How do we know what nutrients will help us fight depression?

I started the research for this book because I wanted to rebuild from depression myself. I felt as if I was in a continuous game of “pin the tail on the donkey.” I was blindfolded, searching for that paper donkey on the wall, and hoping to pin the tail on the donkey’s hind end. One more supplement would do it. One more diet change would work. The proverbial tail would end up in the right place and I would feel well again.

I played “pin the tail on the donkey” until my thyroid became sluggish and I gained fifty pounds. Like my grandmother’s many diseases she faced postpartum, I now had a thyroid problem and no pants that fit. I headed to the library and collected the information in this book.

How do we know if we need to eat more zinc? What is the best test for a zinc deficiency? How can we add zinc to our bodies with nutritional supplements? What is the best kind of zinc supplement? How much is too much? How do we increase our food intake of zinc or our body’s absorption of it? This book answers all of these questions.

The answers to these questions will cut the time you spend playing “pin the tail on the donkey” and you, too, will rebuild from

depression. As we rebuild, we will change the current depression trends.

If we do nothing, our children are likely to suffer from depression and we will continue to suffer over the remaining decades of our lives. Whatever are the underlying causes of each of our unique cases of depression, our children are likely to share some of those same characteristics. It is a matter of basic biology that along with our eye color and hair color, we also give our babies our nutritional status. Those same deficiencies that are wreaking havoc in our bodies now are likely to do so in our children and in their children until the cycle is broken. If we can break the cycle, we will have a better quality of life. We can help our children with theirs, and we can affect the trend lines in depression forecasts.

Tools for Change

The second part of this book on nutrients and food offers strategies to maximize the nutrition in your diet. These strategies, implemented over time on days that you feel well, will help you shore up your body. You can gain some inspiration from knowing that not only will your quality of life improve, but you will be giving your children important tools to improve their quality of life. They are not destined to be depressed and your destiny is not fixed either.

We will rebuild from depression. The tools are waiting for us. Use them at a pace you can manage, but begin to implement them. Help your family members and friends implement them. In 2030, rather than lament the global rise in depression, we will celebrate the impact we have made on our own lives and the lives of those around us.