

Natural Health Tips

St John's Wort, Depression and a Word about Herbs

If you happened to open this week's Newsweek you may have frowned over the article presenting the inefficacy of antidepressant drugs.

To be very honest, I was surprised. Unlike other drugs, antidepressants were something I thought really helped.

But when asked by friends or clients, I still used to say I wouldn't take them, because of their side-effects and addictive character.

So what does help with depression?

First of all - a good personal counselor or psychotherapist that can help you dig to the roots of the problem and guide you towards solving the cause.

And for a good, natural remedy that can help you cope with the symptoms of depression, you may want to try St. John's Wort.

This is a folk remedy that has been used for centuries to relieve depression and bring up good mood. In Europe, where herbal remedies are given more attention, this herb is prescribed by medical doctors, who have considered it for years to be more effective than Prozac.

Scientists are trying to understand how it works and the assumption is it activates the same mechanisms as MAO inhibitor drugs do.

You may ask yourself - "But doesn't the newsweek article state MAO inhibitors don't work?"

Well, for one thing, an herb contains hundreds of substances called *phytochemicals* (chemicals of the plant). When an herb is known to be helpful for a particular condition, chemists are trying to identify the one phytochemical that "does the trick", the "active compound", then isolate it and either use it as such, or synthesize it (create another, artificial chemical with same or similar chemical configuration and properties),

the purpose being - you guessed - a PILL that can be patented and marketed. In other words, something that can bring \$\$\$ - and fast.

The catch is that the one active compound will work differently when it's isolated and given in more concentrated amounts - than it does in the natural plant (read: side effects and/or less significant benefits). In the natural plant the compound is present along with many other phytochemicals.

"Harmony" and "Synergy" are the ingredients that are missing from the chemist's test-tube.

Another aspect is that a drug is created artificially in clinical labs, then tested for a short period of time, and then we are told it has been proven effective by "studies". Only one of the problems with these studies is, as the Newsweek

article points out, that we'll never know how (much more) many studies proved the drug to be ineffective ("*the FDA requires two well-designed clinical trials showing a drug is more effective than a placebo.*

That's two, period—even if many more studies show no such effectiveness." -

<http://www.newsweek.com/id/232781/page/2>).

As opposed to this situation, an herbal remedy is something discovered hundreds of years ago, in an *empirical* way (by observing its effect on sick people).

It always brings a smile on my face when I hear "but there's no scientific study proving they help" - and the thought

in my mind that I would rather take a natural herb that people have been using for a hundred years or more and does no harm to the body - than a chemical drug that was rushed to the market after a few short studies. Not to mention the credibility of those "studies"

- read more about that in The Depressing News About Antidepressants

(<http://www.newsweek.com/id/232781/>).

IMPORTANT: IF YOU ARE TAKING ANTIDEPRESSANTS DO NOT DECIDE TO WITHDRAW ON YOUR OWN WITHOUT CONSULTING YOUR DOCTOR OR NATUROPATHIC CONSULTANT. WEANING OFF THIS KIND OF MEDICATION MUST BE DONE VERY SLOWLY AND BE SUPERVISED.