ForeWord Reviews

BODY, MIND & SPIRIT

Solving the Depression Puzzle
Rita Elkins
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It's the number one health problem in America today, affecting over twenty million people and costing nearly forty-three billion dollars a year to treat. Whether labeled the doldrums, the blues, or bad hair days, depression must be taken seriously. According to natural health expert Elkins, depressed people are at an increased rate for heart attacks, strokes, and immune system disorders, some of which might be caused by physical factors, chemicals in the environment, or stress on the job. Believing an informed and proactive approach is the best way to combat this widespread disorder, Elkins offers a comprehensive "puzzle-solving" guide to the biological, environmental, and lifestyle factors behind depression along with recommendations on how to treat it using natural and alternative therapies.

Because of the multi-dimensional nature of depression, Elkins asserts that alternative medicine with its emphasis on the connection between mind and body is a better, safer treatment method than conventional medicine, which too often relies on a "pharmaceutical magic bullet." Her argument is made more persuasive by her reader-friendly writing style in which current scientific research is seamlessly braided with pertinent information about how the body reacts to depression-causing factors. In an argument against caffeine, she jolts the reader to attention by citing a study that correlates the high suicide risk among nurses with their equally high rate of caffeine consumption. In promoting music therapy, she uses another study to illustrate how people's heartbeats were found to synchronize with the relaxing tempo of Baroque music.

Elkins' chapters on how the body and brain react to certain foods, drugs, and environmental culprits, as well as her entire section on alternative therapies, such as the physiological and psychological benefits of light therapy, are exceptional. More controversial might be her prescriptions for natural medicines, including a core regimen of vitamins and naturopathic remedies, as well as supplemental treatment plans. Although eye of newt and toe of frog are not on her list, there are products such as 5-HTP and L-Tryptophan that should be discussed with a doctor before taking, something Elkins recommends, emphasizing that her suggestions are merely a "springboard" for discussion between patients and their doctors.

By amply illustrating that "everything from food to fungi" can lie behind depression, Elkins offers hope to those people doubly burdened with the self-blame that so often accompanies the disorder. Her substantive and encouraging book is proof that "even in the midst of your darkest winter, you can find your invincible summer."

Judy Hopkins