

# Avoiding Depression and Overcoming it Without Medication

By Ven. Maitipe Wimalasara

The subject of depression is a serious one. If any of you suffer from this condition and are on prescribed medication, please don't stop taking your medicine. This discussion is meant to put depression into a relevant perspective – and it will offer Buddhist “life tools” for handling it under typical circumstances. Even if you *are* taking medication, these tools will be valuable supplements.

Since the beginning of time man has sought to find a way to alleviate the basic human phenomenon of depression. All religions attempt in some way or form to address and to develop tools to overcome depression. Most of us are programmed to believe that depression comes from “external forces,” but Buddhism teaches us that it starts in the interior world of the mind.

Developing wholesome habits and a wholesome lifestyle are keys to avoiding and overcoming depression. In the modern society temptation is very high to develop unwholesome habits and an unwholesome lifestyle. We are programmed to develop high levels of material, mental, and emotional expectations, and we exert intense efforts toward their fulfillment – even though they lead to suffering rather than happiness. The Buddha said that happiness is the greatest wealth, but wealth is not the greatest happiness.

Remember that everything – including depression – is impermanent and subject to change. “This too shall pass.” Appearances make it very difficult to believe that everything is impermanent, and as long as we only believe in appearances the agony of depression will continue. Remember also that “staying in the present moment” is where happiness is found.

Don't take your thoughts and emotions too seriously. They are only real to you – and not to anyone else. It is human nature to try to blame something or someone for the way we feel. In reality, however, we are all responsible for our wholesome and unwholesome choices – each one bringing either suffering or happiness.

Always use discernment when choosing your associates. Remember the value of noble friends. In fact, the Buddha said that achieving enlightenment or *Nibbana* can only come by associating with noble friends.

The mind tends to latch onto thoughts and play them over and over again. If these are negative thoughts about a situation, this will lead to re-living the scenario over and over again in one's mind. Negative thoughts can have similar effects on our bodies to actual strenuous physical experiences, which will eventually lead to substantial depression. How can someone break this chain of repetitive negative thoughts?

Remember: “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” There is no substitute for a simple self-contained life. We should all strive to live in a peaceful environment where we avoid distracting temptations, to faithfully and consistently develop our internal culture.

Mindfulness and meditation are the Buddhist tools for curing depression when it inevitably occurs. It goes to the heart of a person's depression caused by obsessive negative thoughts; it enables a person to experience deep relaxation and a profound level of calmness in mind, giving one the ability to recognize and control repetitive negative thoughts. Slowly, he or she will be able to overcome and avoid depression.