

# Chapter 1

## What You've Always Needed to Know About Depression

*When you know its working parts, depression will no longer suck you in like a sinking star.*

Depression once brought me to my knees. It was the fight of my life. I won that fight and so can you! Most people who seek help for depression want to know two things: Is there something that can stop the torture? And can I do it without drugs? The answer is yes, and yes. All suffering, depression included, can be and should be understood in the larger terms of utilizing *healthy brain functions*, not just brain pathology.

You have probably opened this book because you or someone you love is struggling with depression. You have come to the right place. I am a licensed cognitive behavioral therapist and a certified hypnotist. I worked in a woman's counseling center for seven years before I opened my own private practice. One of the most important things in my background is that as a young woman in my thirties I was diagnosed with manic-depression, as was my father and brother. It's now called bipolar disorder but I prefer the original term for its more graphic description.

Although I am a happy person now, for almost 30 years I was an unhappy one. Chronic depression devastated my life, and almost ruined my marriage. In the last fifteen years I have been so little troubled by depression that I no longer think of it as the enemy of the spirit so much as the teacher of the soul.

Not that depression doesn't still come down upon me. I spent so many years being depressed that those neural patterns are practically hardwired in my brain. However, when they are triggered for whatever reason, *I am out of them in minutes instead of the days, weeks, or months it used to take*. Depression no longer has the power to interrupt my life because I know what to do when it attacks.

### **Depression can happen to anyone**

Perfectly normal people can have depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. They may come on suddenly and unexpectedly; or they can be your constant companion for weeks, months, or even years. The pain can be so unbearable that some people even consider ending it all just to escape it.

Sometimes depression occurs when things are going well and there's no clear reason for our sudden unhappiness. At other times depression and problems become so inter-mixed that we think we are suffering from our problems when, in fact, we are suffering from our depression.

The symptoms are not going away by themselves anytime soon. Even though depression is certainly cyclical, you can't count on its cyclical nature to enable depression to cure itself. But a new cognitive behavior technique called "Brainswitching" uses the principles underlying its cyclic nature to rescue you quickly from the agony of depression. Depression is like living in a room of pain; you can learn how to leave the room.

You cannot will yourself out of a deep depression because the pain is caused by a chemical imbalance. But this targeted system of mind techniques can short-circuit the

agony by disconnecting the message that you are depressed from one part of the brain to the other until the chemical balance is restored. Brainswitching deals instantly with the physical pain of depression. Cognitive behavior therapy and psychotherapy do not. Drugs may take weeks or months to work.

However, it will not take you long to learn Brainswitching. Those who get depressed know how rapidly we can be laid low by it. Now here is a process that can get us out of it just as fast. It's about time! Until now depression has been an unsolvable problem for millions of people.

## **Two different schools of thinking about depression**

To add to our confusion, two entirely different schools of thought about depression have been polarizing in the last few years providing little security in the middle for those looking for a safe and sure treatment that really works. Chronic depression has become like the old proverb: *Who shall decide when doctors disagree?* Meanwhile people's very lives are hanging in the balance.

One thinking insists depression is a character flaw or psychological problem that's "all in your head." The solutions that come along with this theory tend to be low-key, sporadic, and non-specific. It suggests that you do such things as count your blessings and be grateful for what you have, exercise more emotional self-control, think positive, take the bad along with the good like everybody else, plan a weekly pleasant activity, take up jogging, volunteer to help others less fortunate, accept your pain and it will disappear.

The other school of thought claims just the opposite, that depression *definitely* is not "all in your head." This theory holds depression to be an incurable, genetically-based mental illness, over which you have *no control whatsoever*. The treatment advocated here is therapy and medication for the rest of your life.

This dichotomy has not only been a problem for those who are depressed, but for the professional community dedicated to helping them. Our common sense need not be trapped any longer in this therapeutic tug of war. There is a better answer!

## **The FRS factor of depression**

We need to understand that depression is more than an incomplete gestalt of self-reported symptoms. We need to treat depression more than palliatively. We need to understand and treat depression neuroscientifically for the *biochemical* event that it is. *This is not incompatible with either school of thought*, and it successfully addresses the legitimate concerns of both.

This was the subject of my workshops for the California Council on Family Relations. The conference was mostly attended by students, counselors, and psychologists whose careers involve helping people through their emotional setbacks.

My lectures included an explanation of the physiological components of our feelings--*how* do we feel what we feel? I discussed the process whereby signals from the emotional part of the brain (the subcortex) must travel upwards and be acknowledged in the thinking part of the brain (the neocortex) before a human being is able to feel any pain or emotion.

It is inconceivable to me that anyone would be successful in understanding, *much less treating depression*, without some knowledge of the small area in the neocortex called the “feelings receptor station.” I call it the FRS factor of depression. But when I asked the mainly professional audience if they had ever heard of this neuronal process of pain perception before, not a single hand went up!

Of course it is such a tiny event, brain-wise, that it happens beneath our level of awareness. But this small instantaneous process underlies the reason depression is cyclical. The fact that depression is cyclical is extremely important. All depression ends at some point, sooner or later, *anyway*. Why not move it faster along its natural continuum and get it to end sooner, rather than later? This is the whole point of Brainswitching.

Once aware of the pain perception process in the neocortex, we can take advantage of it to move ourselves out of depression rapidly. Much faster than would be the normal course of any depressive event. You can get so good at Brainswitching that depression will cease to be a major issue in your life. You can opt out of it quickly whenever it strikes.

### **First, you need to know a little bit about how your brain works**

Brainswitching is not a magic bullet. You have to do a little work before you get the hang of it. Nevertheless, the same way that many diabetics can stem the tide of their disease with slight changes in their diet and exercise, those with depression can turn their whole life around by making small, precise, and particular interruptions in certain habitual thinking processes. If you don't understand this last sentence, don't worry. The first few chapters will make it crystal clear.

In order to make these changes, you will need a bare-bones education in how your brain functions which you will get in the beginning chapters of this book. Don't be alarmed. All you really need to know about your brain can be understood by any serious-minded eighth-grader. And you will be a wiser, more tranquil person for your effort.

With this information you can make use of the latest research which shows that depression, anxiety, and even obsessive-compulsive disorders can be eliminated by altering one or two thinking patterns. You can sidetrack automatic depressive patterns by building new and more helpful *get-out-of-depression* patterns which you soon learn to use as automatically as the old destructive ones. Again, how to do this will become clear as you read the book.

As a psychotherapist I endured lengthy bouts of life-dulling depression for decades. Not anymore! I discovered the mechanism behind Brainswitching in cutting-edge neuroscience research and brain-mapping as I strove to help those who came into my counseling office looking for relief from their pain. As a result I found the answer to my own chronic depression, mania, anxiety, and panic attacks that I had struggled with for so long.

### **You can side-step depression**

I have successfully presented my research findings to the National Board of Cognitive Behavioral Therapists and subsequently have provided workshops for

professional organizations and holistic health schools. Thousands of people are now learning the technique.

Brainswitching is immediate. It lets you quickly side-step the depression which is generated in the emotional part of your brain (the subcortex) by taking temporary refuge in the thinking part of your brain (the neocortex), *which never contains depression*. Brainswitching handles stress, anxiety, and depression from the feelings receptor station in the neocortex.

The process allows you to consciously shift the neuronal activity of your brain from the subcortex, where depression is always located, to the neocortex which does not have the capacity for depression. You can learn to do this.

Brainswitching is for you if you have any kind of recurring depression or anxiety; if you have felt vaguely disconnected and too stressed to have the normal life that you see other people enjoying; or if you have asked yourself the question: “Will I ever be really happy again?”

### **Brainswitching short-circuits the short circuit**

There’s no doubt that depression, or indeed any serious emotional upset, has the capacity to temporarily short-circuit the thinking brain. Suddenly we are under stress. We are anxious, or depressed, and we can’t think straight. Our mind seems to go blank, and our normal thinking goes “off line.”

There is good reason for this. The emotional brain, being the ancient core system around which all the rest of the brain subsequently evolved, is our primal instinct. We are genetically scripted to get automatically hooked by it. However, once you have a “bird’s eye view” of how the whole system operates, you will become more wary of getting snagged in it. You will be able to by-pass this emotional short-circuit, and access your thinking brain again. That is the subject of this book.

Depression is real. We can feel it. Hook us up to a brain scan and we can see it. We can measure it in the lost hours and lost opportunities of our lives. We can quantify it chemically, bioelectrically, and neuroscientifically. We can verify it physically and psychologically. And now, thankfully, we can stop it with Brainswitching.