

Working with Depression and Stress

Depression is very often accompanied by anxiety and tension. Treatment for depression is usually begun by treating the anxiety first, when it is present. Anxiety and depression can often be part of the same complex problem. Most depression I treat is the result of an unconscious attempt to control and reduce feelings of anxiety by reflexively denying or avoiding feeling in the body. When the anxiety is dissolved the need to control anxiety by depressing oneself also disappears and depression can lift on its own or can be easily dissolved through training with neurofeedback.

Narrow-objective focus upon pain greatly exacerbates the experience of pain; changing to diffuse-immersed attention eases even extreme pain. The plethora of symptoms indicating depression includes: pain in the spine and shoulder blades, a sense of overall heaviness and brokenness, neck and head tension, numbness, burning in the upper spine, fear in the heart, anger at the truck driver who cut you off, nightmares, waking insomnia (awaking during the night and not being able to fall back to sleep), and other negative emotions. All of these are mitigated or resolved by daily home practice of dissolving-pain techniques and office sessions of EEG-synchrony training.

It is easier to treat depression if there is anxiety (anxiety is easier to dissolve), but we can work directly by using feelings of depression, sadness, loneliness, or despair as the pain that we dissolve, instead of anxiety. Depression and anxiety take years to form, in both the brain and body, and they may have their roots both in genetic predisposition and in powerful situational influences in early life and beyond. When clients habitually return to a chronic narrow focus, they bring on these feelings again. Thus, I encourage people to use these negative feelings as feedback. If they start to feel anxious or depressed, or if other unpleasant feelings return, these experiences can serve as a reminder to move back into an open focus attention style, which allows stress, tension, and other unwanted feelings to dissipate. The pain becomes feedback. At some point clients are sufficiently better that they can reduce coming for treatment. We instruct clients to continue to dissolve layers of repressed emotion until they can welcome the process of being open to feelings, and have the confidence to dissolve them by themselves at home.

And, even though repressed traumatic memories are buried, the negative feelings are not lost and the tension and energy necessary to repress any highly charged experience takes a tremendous toll on us physically and psychologically. Repressed trauma affects nearly every aspect of our lives. As the tensions and emotions surface and dissolve in a more open focused attention style, life changes for the better. At the same time, it is not unusual in our practice to dissolve the residual emotions and tensions of a long-forgotten trauma without the patient remembering or reliving the situation of the traumatizing event itself. The event may later be remembered without much or any attendant emotion or tension.

One region of the body where we accumulate a great deal of pain and tension, both emotional and physical, is our eyes. At one level, the eye is changed by physical stress because of how we use it. From an evolutionary perspective, humans paid attention very differently for most of their history than they do now. Today narrow-objective focus dominates our day. Sitting in front of a computer or performing a repetitive task on a factory assembly line for hours and days on end can cause serious eye strain. Forcing ourselves to pay extra, sustained attention to things we need—rather than desire—to see causes even more eyestrain, which in turn leads to everything from headaches to neck and shoulder pain.

Emotional stress may have an even greater impact on our eyes than physical stress. Because they are so vital to making our way in the world, responding to fear and being vigilant to assure our safety, the muscles of the eye are among the most sensitive to emotional stress. Growing up, all of us at times feel unsafe and threatened in our environment, which leads to chronic narrow focus and to tension of the eye and face muscles. This distorts the eyeball, restricts its movement, and affects vision. We can learn to gain some control over our eye muscles and release the tension and pain we carry in them. Learning to employ an open focus attention with brain-training can make the world a rosier place.