

Nutritional Therapies for Mental Disorders

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Currently, 1 in 4 adult Americans have been diagnosed with a mental disorder. This roughly translates into about 58 million people. Additionally, mental disorders are the leading cause for disability in the US. The four most common of these include major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Typically, these disorders are treated using pharmaceutical drugs. Considering the number of Americans affected, it isn't surprising to see the high revenue generated. In 2008 alone the antipsychotic revenue was the highest of the therapeutic classes and topped \$14.6 billion. Although these drugs can be highly effective, many of them come with unwanted side effects. For example, lithium is usually prescribed for bipolar disorder. About 75% of people who take therapeutic levels of lithium experience side effects that include hand tremors, increased thirst, increased urination, diarrhea, vomiting, weight gain, impaired memory, poor concentration, drowsiness, muscle weakness, hair loss, acne, and decreased thyroid function.

Recently, top researchers have noticed a correlation between increase in mental disorders and deterioration of diet. The most common nutritional deficiencies seen in mental disorder patients are of omega-3 fatty acids, B vitamins, minerals, and amino acids that are precursors to neurotransmitters.

Major depression is a disorder that presents with symptoms that include decreased mood, sleeping problems, increased sadness and anxiety, loss of appetite, and loss of interest in normal daily activities, to name a few. It appears that this is mostly caused by a combination of stress, genetics, and temperament. According to the research conducted, it's been concluded that some of the biochemical abnormalities include the following deficiencies; omega-3 fatty acids specifically containing eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA), vitamin B-12, serotonin, and magnesium.

A patient suffering from major depression may also present symptoms such as recurring episodes of debilitating depression, uncontrollable mania, hypomania, or a mixed state (manic and depressive episode) which is clinically diagnosed as bipolar disorder. Some biochemical abnormalities in people with bipolar disorder include oversensitivity to acetylcholine, excess vanadium, vitamin B deficiencies, a taurine deficiency, anemia, omega-3 fatty acid deficiencies, and vitamin C deficiency.

Schizophrenia is a psychiatric diagnosis that describes a mental disorder characterized by abnormalities in the perception or expression of reality. It most commonly manifests as auditory



hallucinations, paranoid or bizarre delusions, or disorganized speech and thinking with significant social or occupational dysfunction. In schizophrenic patients the biochemical abnormalities are impaired serotonin synthesis, glycine deficiency, and omega-3 deficiency.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is classified as an anxiety disorder. It's characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviors (compulsions), which are repeated in an uncontrollable manner as a means of repressing the stressful thought. According to many documented researchers, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) help patients with OCD. Therefore, taking St. John's wort, a supplement that will increase serotonin levels, will reduce the symptoms of OCD.

After effectively examining the four most prevalent mental disorders of modern day, one can successfully reason that there is alternative means to conventional treatment. Supplementing ones diet with the correct vitamin and dosage can prove to be as effective as pharmaceutical drugs with minimal side effects. Although this is the case, it is obvious that treatment occur hand-in-hand with professional medical observation.

References:

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