

## THE DEPRESSION CURE

### THE TLC PROTOCOL

#### *Week 1*

**Supplements.** During your first week, I suggest starting with a simple change that takes only a minute of your day, but that still has a surprisingly potent effect on the brain: nutritional supplementation. There are five products you'll need to buy. (All can be found at a local health food store or drug store, but they're usually less expensive when purchased online.)

- **Omega-3:** This is best obtained in the form of high-quality fish oil capsules (or liquid). Try starting at a total omega-3 dosage of 1000 mg of EPA and 500 mg of DHA\* each day.
- **Vitamin D:** If, like most Americans, you're not synthesizing enough vitamin D in your skin—through regular brief exposure to the sun's UV rays—it is important to take a supplement. I recommend a dose of 2000 IU each day, in the form of vitamin D<sub>3</sub>.
- **Multivitamin:** Because omega-3s are fragile molecules, they need some help in the body to do their job. Specifically, they require the protection provided by antioxidants, found in reasonably high quantities in any good daily multivitamin.
- **Vitamin C:** For added antioxidant protection, I also suggest taking a 500 mg supplement of vitamin C each day.
- **Evening primrose oil:** Evening primrose oil provides your brain with an essential fat called GLA, which can get depleted when

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\* Many supplements contain a 2:1 ratio of EPA to DHA, which allows you to get an exact ratio of 1000 mg of EPA and 500 mg of DHA. But some have a higher concentration of DHA, so they provide more than 500 mg of DHA for every 1000 mg of EPA. That's perfectly fine, as well. The important thing is to get 1000 mg of EPA and *at least* 500 mg of DHA.

you take high doses of omega-3s. You need only a little of this oil, though—just one 500 mg capsule each week.\* It's important not to exceed this dose, because taking too much can cause unwanted inflammation.

**Rumination.** In addition to starting nutritional supplementation this week, you can take an important first step toward ending rumination. Specifically, I suggest that you try noticing throughout the day each time you find yourself brooding over negative thoughts. As described earlier, it's impossible to stop rumination without learning first how to detect the process when it's happening. (Most depressed individuals spend a great deal of time brooding without any real awareness that they're doing so.) Several strategies for learning how to notice rumination are discussed on pages 94–100.

**Depression Scale.** At the end of each week, complete the depression scale and compare the result with your baseline score to see if any changes have occurred.

## *Week 2*

**Supplements.** Continue as in Week 1.

**Rumination.** Now that you've become more skilled at noticing your ruminative thoughts (after a week's worth of practice), begin interrupting these thoughts by redirecting your attention each time they occur. You can do this by applying the many techniques described in Chapter 5, including making a list of engaging activities to try this week; identifying and avoiding the specific situations that commonly

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\* This provides 40 to 50 mg of GLA—a full week's supply.

lead you to ruminate; and scheduling at least one activity each day to take the place of those high-risk situations.

**Exercise.** You won't start the exercise part of the program until Week 3, but you'll need to make sure you have a few things in place by then. First, pick up a heart rate monitor, or if you can't afford one right now, make sure you can reliably take your pulse. Second, choose the form of exercise you'll be starting with, and make sure you have access to any necessary equipment. (For some people, this will mean lining up a gym membership.) Finally, unless you've already been working out on a regular basis, you may want to consider hiring a personal trainer for at least the first six weeks to help you get started. (You can contact any local gym or health club for referrals.)

**Depression Scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

### *Week 3*

**Supplements.** Continue as before.

**Rumination.** Keep working to improve your ability to notice rumination, and try to get to the point where you can catch yourself the moment it begins. Likewise, keep experimenting with different activities to interrupt it. Every time you find something that works, try other activities that seem similar. For example, if you find that playing Scrabble™ online is helpful, you might experiment with some other online games. Finally, continue avoiding high-risk situations and substituting more engaging activities in their place. Schedule at least one such activity each day.

**Exercise.** Mark off in your schedule three hour-long blocks of time for exercise this week. (Even though you won't be exercising

for the full hour, this will leave enough time for you to cool down and clean up afterwards.) Each time you work out, the goal is to exercise intensely enough to get your heart rate in the target aerobic range (refer to Chapter 6, Table 6-1) and keep it there for thirty minutes. If you haven't been active in some time (or even if you have), I strongly recommend that you begin with brisk walking, because it is by far the easiest, most natural aerobic activity for most people to pick up.

**Light.** If you're going to be using a light box for your bright light exposure, order it this week so it will be on hand for Week 4.

**Depression Scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

#### *Week 4*

**Supplements.** Continue as before.

**Rumination.** Continue as before.

**Exercise.** Continue as before. If you weren't successful last week in exercising aerobically three times, that's a good indication that hiring a personal trainer may be necessary to help you get started.

**Light.** Begin scheduling thirty minutes of bright light exposure each morning, as outlined in Chapter 7. (Or, if you're consistently waking up too early in the morning, begin scheduling thirty minutes of exposure roughly five hours before your planned bedtime.) Also look for other opportunities to get the benefit of natural sunlight exposure during the day (especially from 11:00 am to 3:00 pm, when vitamin D synthesis is possible).

**Depression scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

*Week 5*

**Supplements.** Continue as before.

**Rumination.** Continue as before.

**Exercise.** Continue as before. If you aren't satisfied at this point with your chosen form of exercise, try experimenting with another one from your list (pages 123–124) instead.

**Light.** Continue as before.

**Social support.** Schedule at least three social activities for the week ahead, writing them in your calendar. It's best to spend time with friends or loved ones whom you can see in person. When that's not possible, substitute phone calls (or video chats) with out-of-town friends and relatives. Another alternative is time spent on supportive online forums for depression (see pages 176–177).

**Depression scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

*Week 6*

**Supplements.** Continue as before.

**Rumination.** Continue as before.

**Exercise.** Continue as before. If you've still not been successful in exercising aerobically at least three times each week, you will almost certainly need to hire a personal trainer to help you with this part of the program.

**Light.** Continue as before.

**Social support.** Schedule at least four social activities for the week ahead, writing them in your calendar. In addition, evaluate whether or not you have any truly toxic relationships in your life;

if you do, try working to improve the relationships that are open to improvement (see pages 177–178) and limiting your contact with any irredeemably toxic individuals by at least 50% in the week ahead.

**Sleep.** Adopt the goal of getting adequate sleep each night: seven to nine hours, depending on your body's needs (see pages 195–197). Put into practice the first two habits of healthy sleep: use your bed only for sleeping and wake up at the same time every morning.

**Depression scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

## *Week 7*

**Evaluation.** You've now been putting the principles of Therapeutic Lifestyle Change into practice for six weeks. Most people will see at least some benefit by this point. Please take a moment to look at your weekly depression scores, going all the way back to the first score before you started the TLC program. Do you see a clear trend toward improvement, with your current level of symptoms at least 25% lower than when you began? If not, it will be important to skip ahead now to Chapter 11, which focuses on troubleshooting, and also to consider immediately contacting a licensed clinician for assistance (including help with putting the TLC program into practice), if you haven't done so already.

**Supplements.** Continue as before. However, if you haven't seen at least a 50% reduction in your symptoms from baseline (when you began the TLC program), consider increasing your omega-3 dose to 2000 mg each day of EPA (with at least 1000 mg of DHA).

**Rumination.** Continue as before.

**Exercise.** Continue as before. If you haven't seen at least a 50% decrease in your baseline depressive symptoms, consider bumping up your exercise regimen to at least five thirty-minute workouts each week.

**Light.** If your depression scale score is now below 10, you can decrease bright light exposure to fifteen minutes each day.

**Social support.** Schedule at least five social activities for the week ahead. Also, try limiting your contact with any irredeemably toxic individuals by an additional 50% in the week ahead.

**Sleep.** Continue as before. Also, work to incorporate the remaining habits of healthy sleep (habits 3 through 10, outlined in Chapter 9, pages 203–210).

**Depression scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

## *Week 8*

**Supplements.** Continue as before.

**Rumination.** Continue as before.

**Exercise.** Continue as before.

**Light.** If your depression scale score is now below 10, you can decrease morning/evening bright light exposure to fifteen minutes each day.

**Social support.** Schedule at least one social activity each day. In addition, target at least one form of community involvement to participate in during the upcoming week. Finally, try eliminating your contact with any irredeemably toxic individuals.

**Sleep.** Continue as before.

**Depression scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

*Weeks 9 through 12*

**Supplements.** Continue as before.

**Rumination.** Continue as before.

**Exercise.** Continue as before.

**Light.** When your depression scale score drops below 10, you can decrease bright light exposure to fifteen minutes each day. Continue adding another fifteen to thirty minutes' worth of sunlight exposure (when it's available) during the day.

**Social support.** Continue as before, and increase your community involvement to at least two forms of activity each week.

**Sleep.** Continue as before.

**Depression scale.** Complete the depression scale and record your score.

**Evaluation.** By the end of twelve weeks (roughly three months), the great majority of our TLC patients at the University of Kansas have experienced significant improvement in depressive symptoms. At a minimum, we expect to observe at least a 50% decrease in severity from pretreatment, at which point most people no longer meet the full diagnostic criteria for major depression, and the overall trajectory points toward complete recovery. If you don't see such improvement\* when looking at your own depression scores, please turn to Chapter

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\* In other words, you should see at least a 50% reduction in your initial depression score (the one obtained before you began putting these lifestyle changes into practice).



11, which focuses on troubleshooting, and consider contacting a licensed clinician for assistance.