

Breakthroughs in healing

with Dr. Simon Sheh

Healthcare Edition

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Beginning in this Fall edition of Breakthroughs in Healing, I am starting a new, practical "How to" series designed to tackle health issues commonly seen in counselling and medical practices. This upcoming series will include the following topics and you are welcome to give your patients copies of the newsletter for educational and therapeutic purposes.

- How to stop depression from taking control of your life.
- How to stop anxiety and stress from taking control of your life.
- How to stop anger from taking control of your life.
- How to stop communication problems from destroying your marriage.
- How to stop addiction to pornography from taking control of your life.
- How to have a healthy sex life in your marriage.

Dr. Simon Sheh
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How to Stop Depression from Taking Control of Your Life

#1 See your doctor

The first step to stop depression from taking control of your life is to see and consult your physician. Ask for a medical examination and make sure there is no other physical or medical condition that could link to depression symptoms. Your physician will make a diagnosis regarding your emotional health and determine the best course of treatment. I do not believe everyone suffering from depression would benefit from medication, but I have come to respect that the right type and right dosage of anti-depressant does play a role re-balancing the neurochemistry that regulate our moods and emotions. When the medication performs well, you will see improvement in your sleep, your energy, and your overall mood. Most of all, when the medication is working well, you will see yourself less dwell on the negative and unproductive thoughts that once plague you in the midst of your depression.

#2 Seek short-term counselling and therapy

I always inform my clients that medications are only half the solution and they are. While medication is able to give your mood a lift so that you can function better at home or at work, it does not address the unfinished business in your life. In many cases, a person's depression is associated with unhealthy self esteem, insecurity, and/or unrealistic expectations. It is quite common

that people who tend to internalize their thoughts and feelings, and has a black and white, all or nothing, and perfectionist thinking is more susceptible to depressive moments and episodes. Medical and psychological research has consistently shown that medication works best when combined with counselling such as cognitive therapy. Counselling does not have to be long-term. Seek out a reputable psychologist or counsellor, and work out some therapeutic goals and homework together to stop depression from taking control of your life. Do not turn your counselling session into an expensive chit-chat. Make your therapist work for your money.

#3 Externalize your depression

Remember, you have depression, but you are not depression. When I work with depressed clients, I often ask them to treat depression as a person and give it a name, like Mr. Depression or Ms. Depression. I tell my clients Mr. Depression does not belong in their bedroom, kitchen, living room, or washroom. The only place Mr. Depression belongs to is the cold, dark, dirty, and tiny closet in the basement. Imagine you are a woman, and you have been sleeping with Mr. Depression on the same bed for the last six months. That is absolutely gross. Slam the closet door on Mr. Depression. Do not let him sneak into your bedroom. Discuss with your therapist and find out any particular patterns, times, and places in which you are more vulnerable to have Mr. Depression sneak back into your life. Treat your therapist's office as a safe place to talk about your vulnerabilities, such

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as fear and insecurity. Once you have externalized your vulnerabilities, and find a healthy way to deal with them, you will begin to see Mr. Depression staying more in the basement's closet, and keep him there.

#4 Practice depression incompatible behaviours

Do you know that you can do depression and increase its occurrences when you practice depression compatible behaviours, such as staying in your house and not going out, and continue to dwell on things you have no control? Mr. Depression is the master con man and forever deceptive. He would not tell you staying off work for too long are not good for you. He would not tell you that internalizing your thoughts and feelings by yourself prolong your depression. I always tell my clients that healing does not happen in isolation. Healing happens in a community of safe people. Therefore it is very important that you continue to connect yourself and do life within a community even you are feeling depressed. Work is therapeutic, and workplace is a community, given you like what you are doing. Unfortunately, for many people, their identity is very much associated with their work place. Depending on your conditions, going on sick leave because of depression should be on a short-term basis only. Once your medication is performing well and you have picked up some healthy coping skills from your therapist, you should consult your physician to set a return to work date. Ask your therapist to have follow-up sessions with you once you return to work.

#5 Change your language

What you say to yourself and others reflect your beliefs on life circumstances. I often listen to my client's language in my counselling sessions. I had a client who referred herself as a victim in front of her mother-in-law who happened to be a highly opinionated woman. Whenever my client had to see her mother-in-law, she would feel anxious and depressed. I told my client that the term "victim" is usually associated with someone who has been severely abused or traumatized by an event or by another person and always wants to feel safe and secure. My client admitted that she grew up in a dysfunctional home and has

been battling low self esteem for years. We came to agree that it is not easy to deal with her mother-in-law, and yet to continue to see herself as a victim, she will likely act like a victim and talk like a victim, and the victim language will reinforce her low self esteem all over her. Instead of labeling her as a victim, I coached my client to use a different language, and that is, on the job training with your mother-in-law. In this job, the learning curve is steep, and there is requirement for a new skill set. Once my client is willing to adopt a "business" approach in dealing with her mother-in-law, she began to take her mother-in-law's opinions less personally, and in turn decreased her anxiety and depression.

#6 Seek a different meaning

Our life is like a book, it is full of chapters. For depressed persons, many of their chapters are unfinished, and they are constantly flipping back to the previous life chapters and have no time and energy to write the present chapter which is wide open. You are the C.E.O. of your life, and you are the director, actor, and writer of your life script. You cannot deny, re-write, or destroy the facts and data in chapter 17 or chapter 22 of your life, but you have every freedom to write a summary with new meaning and close the chapter with a conclusion. You cannot change the facts of life, but you have every control to choose and change the meaning. I have failed is very different from I am the failure. I am the failure means I am no good from top to bottom, and there is no good in me. I have failed means I know which areas of life I have failed and I do not want to repeat my mistakes, and I also know there are many areas of life that I have succeeded. Flipping unfinished life chapters is tiring and a form of depression compatible behaviour. Seek assistance from your therapist to help close unfinished chapters in your life so that you have time and energy to write your present chapter.

#7 Get to know yourself well

A healthy marriage begins with you, not your mate. A happy home begins with you, not your children. In the same token, good mental health begins with you, not your doctor, and definitely not your medication. Self care is not equal to selfishness. The more you know that you are a perfectionist with an unhealthy self esteem, the more you know that you are prone to depression. The more you know that you are a control freak and have an unrealistically high expectation on yourself and others, the more you know that you are prone to stress and anxiety. Just like an alcoholic, without admitting he or she having a drinking problem, there will be no recovery in sight. Medication will not help you get to know yourself. This is your job, and the job of a good friend, a competent counsellor, or a wholesome, soul searching book. Get to know yourself, the strengths and the downsides. Change your language, seek a different meaning, work with your doctor and your therapist, and you will begin to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Dr. Simon Sheh's upcoming seminars and speaking engagements

How to Stop Depression from Taking Control of Your Life

Wednesday, September 22, 2004, 7:30 pm – 8:30 pm
Public Health Seminar
Meadowlark Health Centre, Edmonton
For registration, call 429-4761, ext. 237

Addiction to Pornography: A Mental Health Matter

Thursday, October 7, 2004, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Mental Health Conference
Black Knight Inn, Red Deer, Alberta
For information, contact Canadian Mental Health at 342-2266

Leadership and Sexual Integrity

Friday, October 22, 2004, 7:00 – 9:30 pm
Saturday, October 23, 2004, 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
Beulah Alliance Church, Edmonton, Alberta

For information and registration, go to www.drsimonsheh.com.

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