

how
to **heal**
yourself
from depression
when no one else can

A Self-Guided
Program
to Stop
Feeling Like
Sh*t

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PART I

The Path:

From Feeling Bad to Good
(and Good Enough)
Discovering a New Way

Depression is not all in our head. It's not all in our body, either. Depression happens in the whole self. Depression is a condition that arises from a misalignment or disconnection in your being. As I see it, depression is not *the problem*. It's a side effect of it. But just as depression happens in the whole self, healing does too.



Why We Really Feel Like Shit (Even When There’s “No Good Reason”)

Times of feeling bad are totally normal, although many of us learned early in life to resist these feelings (which we’ll fix together, soon). Life brings difficulties and challenges that we meet with all kinds of emotions: confusion, grief, sadness, frustration, anger, and more. Our moods ebb and flow, our feelings change, and more. If strong feelings remain, though, and there is no trigger or “reason” that we can identify, *depression* is often the label we end up with.

In this chapter, we’re going to talk about a new way of looking at depression, from an energetic perspective. All of my insights about depression will be shared from this perspective. These do not negate any diagnosis or perspective that your health-care practitioner has shared with you. My perspective is simply an additional,

and maybe new, way of seeing things. I hope this chapter will help you not only find compassion for yourself and why you are feeling bad, but also give you hope that there's so much we can still do to help you, together.

What Depression Is Really About

There are endless theories and studies about the causes of depression. While I'm not going to cover them here, what we do know now is that how we understand it is constantly evolving. One way this is true is the evolution of thinking—from our health “is all in our genes” to it's definitely “not all in our genes.” The field of epigenetics, the study of how our thoughts, lifestyle, and environment switch genes on and off, has taught us that our DNA isn't the driving force behind all that ails us. You are an active player. We used to equate the body to a machine that, when malfunctioning, had a broken mechanism; we now consider that the operator (aka you) of the machine itself is just as important to look at.

In line with the old “it's the genes” school of thought, we know our current paradigm of looking for chemical, biological, or behavioral glitches doesn't offer all the answers. Based on a trend of studies, the issue of depression is getting worse, not better, despite all the drug and therapy interventions we have available to us.

I've met an endless number of people who have received this or that diagnosis and fixed it with this or that suggested solution—and still remained depressed. This was true for my own dad, who had corrected every chemical and hormonal imbalance in his brain and body with no lasting relief. But it's not all that surprising. That's because, while certain gene expressions or biochemical processes most certainly affect our bodies, we also know that our thoughts, emotions, and stress play just as significant a role.

The bottom line is clear: wherever depression comes from, the way we approach healing from it doesn't always work to the degree we want and need.

Working with the body's energy system, which we'll be doing in this book, is an entirely different way of working to heal depression—but you don't have to choose only one approach. In fact, you should most definitely not abandon whatever you are currently doing with your health-care practitioner. This is not about either/or. It can, and should, be both/and. This book is not about making a case that whatever's being done for depression is wrong. This book is about you—and knowing that if you've felt like a freak who doesn't get better after following all the leads and trying all the medications, you are not alone. These are the precise types of cases that doctors, natural practitioners, and psychologists have referred to my work for help. And I suspect that the scenarios where nothing else has worked are more the majority than has been believed. All this to say one important thing: there is something additional, and perhaps deeper, that can be done to help you feel better, and we're here to do it.

Depression can be the silent way that we grieve for our needs unmet and desires unfulfilled. It is how we *feel* the disconnection from ourselves. In fact, *depress*, by definition, means to push or press down. Over time, what we push or press down (suppress), ignore, or are unaware of becomes the weight we carry through life—our emotional “baggage.” It's the stress we hold inside of us. If we carry this baggage long enough without resolution, it can overpower us and cut us off from our connection to ourselves, and thus from our inherent joy and interest in life. Emotional baggage does not cause depression but rather prevents happiness as a natural occurrence. This is a heavy burden to bear—but none of it is your fault. Let me share an analogy to help you understand how you might have gotten where you are.

How Depression Happens: Meet the Volcano

Depression is a condition that arises from a misalignment or disconnection in your being. As I see it, depression is not a singular problem. Depression is the result of the *real* problem: getting separated from ourselves, and therefore, losing our connection to life.

Depression can happen for many reasons, but *none* of them are because you are broken. You have ended up separated from yourself because of something called *life*, which comes with the traumas and complexities of being human. Eventually, all the “stuff” you’ve been trying to contain inside your being simply becomes too much. I liken this process to a volcano that can only contain so much pressure before it erupts, covering everything in a thick layer of sludgy lava. Depression is a result of the eruption, covering us with a thick layer of heaviness that buries us under our own lives.

Sometimes, people get depressed during a time of great distress. Sometimes, depression seems to come from “out of the blue,” after a stressful event has passed, or even when everything is going smoothly. While depression can feel like it happens suddenly and for no reason, it usually happens more like a slow fog that rolls in over time; more likely, it is only the *realization* of depression that seems sudden. Sometimes the grief over our lives only comes when it’s ready—when *we* are ready.

Either way, when there is enough suppressed emotional baggage stuck deep down inside of us, we often end up splitting off from our depressed pain and ourselves—without effective tools to make our way out of it. To complicate things, much of what I just described is happening outside of our awareness. That’s why many people have a hard time identifying the cause of depression, or even when it might have started. This is even more true for caregivers, who while being focused on others tend to ignore their own needs.

Because our emotions are the root of who we are, everything we experience is tied to our emotional selves. And this is the part of us that is at the core of depression. In fact, your emotions drive both your biology and behavior. The late Candace Pert, a well-respected neuroscientist and the author of *Molecules of Emotion*, wrote that unexpressed emotions are literally lodged in the body, not just a product of the mind. She summed up their affect perfectly: “A feeling sparked in our mind—or body—will translate as a peptide being released somewhere. [Organs, tissues, skin, muscle, and endocrine glands], they all have peptide receptors on them and can access and store emotional information. This means the emotional memory is stored in many places in the body, not just or even primarily, in the brain.” And “when emotions are repressed, denied, not allowed to be whatever they may be, our network pathways get blocked, stopping the flow of the vital feel-good, unifying chemicals that run both our biology and our behavior.”¹ Our biology refers to our bodies, and our behaviors refer to our minds. Dr. Pert’s statement is a perfect example of why chemicals and hormones may be imbalanced with depression, yet the depression is so often not resolved by fixing imbalances.

See the mess you’ve been in? And do you now understand why it’s been hard to feel better no matter how hard you’ve tried? Don’t worry, we’re going to work on turning it around together. But first, let’s take a closer look at how the mind and body are directly connected to depression.

The Anatomy of Depression

Depression isn’t all in your head. It’s not all in your body, either. It’s actually in a lot of places. Feeling shitty happens in the whole person—mind, body, and energy system. This is true even if you

and your doctor have identified physical or chemical contributors to how you feel. Everything is always happening in the mind-body; it's not a case of either/or. They are both, for better or worse, intricately connected. The field of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) has documented multiple interactions of stress and the endocrine, immune, and nervous systems that impact the way we function. This reinforces how our mind-body is a cofunctioning system, which gives us great insight into more effective healing. Let's look at how both body and mind play a role in the process of depression.

Body

The human body is composed of a network of electrical impulses that run through us: our energy system. You may be familiar with the idea of energy in the body via the common diagnostic tools of EKG and EEG (reading electrical impulses of heart and brain). The foundation of Eastern medical systems is the subtle energy system—accessed by acupuncture to regulate and enhance the healthy flow of energy inside of us. These subtle energies in our bodies run through every part of us in distinct patterns: organs, muscles, glands, and more. Each and every function of our bodies interacts with this energy system, including our emotions, thoughts, and beliefs. You'll be learning a lot more about the energy system in the next chapter. But let's talk just a bit about it now to get you acquainted.

I see the energy system as an umbrella that encompasses both mind and body. When our energies are disrupted or become sluggish and blocked, we can feel it physically and/or emotionally. An imbalance or disruption in your system can create a number of sensations, such as burning in your chest, a sensation of fear, tightness in your neck, or obsessive thoughts. Symptoms in a specific area can be an indication that you are experiencing a lack of

energy flow to that very part of your body due to a blockage in your energy system.

If the flow is interrupted long enough, you may even manifest a longer-term physical problem in the area or imbalances in your chemistry (controlled by all the organs and glands, which need a healthy flow of energy to function properly). Energetically, depression often manifests as physical feelings in the chest, lungs, and back. Many people struggling with grief, hopelessness, and sadness (all related to depression) tend toward respiratory infections, muscular issues in the chest and upper back, coughs, and more. In contrast, people who tend to worry experience stomachaches and digestion issues (as worry tends to affect the stomach and other related organs). Any emotional baggage can be stuck in *any* area of the body, though. Again, we look to Candace Pert and her research for a more scientific take. She explains that emotional memory is stored throughout the body and that “you can access emotional memory anywhere in the network.” Pert envisioned emotions traveling in both directions, from the brain into the body, and up the body into the brain. This is important to note when we consider how chemical imbalances may be connected to depression. Pert’s research helps us understand why we may be able to affect neurochemistry by working with the body’s energy system.

Our energy system is interacting with the world at all times. Each and every part of our lives affects our energy system by enhancing its flow or detracting from it. If something has a negative influence on our electrical system and does not help maintain or enhance our body’s energy flow, the energy system will temporarily “short-circuit,” affecting the electrical (or energetic) flow running through our muscles, glands, and other organs. Some of the things that can affect our electrical system are thoughts, emotions, foods, and other substances. But, in my experience, the

emotions that Pert describes as running our biology and behavior can have an equal or greater impact on us than our external environment. This is because suppressed emotions cause stress in the body, triggering a physiological response. Simply put, feeling bad comes from having bad feelings. This is why understanding the importance of the energy body in terms of the emotional connection in depression can be such a healing revelation.

Mind(s)

You may not know this, but each of us essentially has two minds, each with its own set of functions, rules, and way of perceiving the world: the conscious mind and the subconscious mind. The conscious mind is what creates. However, neuroscience has acknowledged that the subconscious mind controls 95 percent of our lives, making it our “dominant mind.” The subconscious is the mind of habit and preprogrammed rules. This leaves us with a whole lot of ideas about how to fix a problem (thank you, conscious mind) but little ability to affect that actual change to get things fixed.

Your subconscious is super intelligent—so much so that it doesn’t need your help with much of anything at all. It drives multiple functions in your body without you actively making them happen, such as breathing. The subconscious mind records everything that happens in our lives, including memories, emotions, and things we’ve learned or perceived (messages about ourselves from other people). Just like a computer, it analyzes and organizes data and creates programming that directs behavior. You don’t have to do anything consciously to make this happen. Pretty cool. But on the downside, it also drives many functions of your life without you having a thing to do with it. This is, to say the least, a problem (but just for now). That’s because the information and programming in your subconscious mind is primarily based on your life experiences

from before the age of seven. I know you can't see me, but I'm covering my eyes in horror over here, and I bet you are too.

If your subconscious mind doesn't need your permission or input to drive behavior, and it's relying on your pre-seven-year-old-self's historical data as a basis for that behavior, then . . . we are all basically kids running around trying to act like highly functioning adults. I have to say, I was a pretty mature child, but I'd never willingly allow my seven-year-old-self to take the steering wheel of my life. Yet, that's exactly what was going on before I discovered who the real boss of me was. That's probably what's happening to you too.

If you have been sad or hopeless because you just "can't get over" whatever it is that's been going on with you, stop right now. If you've been trying to force yourself into happiness with a boot camp-like regimen of positive thinking or whatever else, just pause. If you've been trying to feel good but have not worked in alliance with your subconscious mind to make that happen, forgive yourself right now. Take a deep breath and listen to me.

When old programming runs your life, you've essentially been fighting an impossible battle. You've essentially been trying to live for and in the *now* while playing old tapes from your past. The subconscious mind is an agent of protection. It guards that data from our past and will do anything—based on that information from our inner seven-year-old—to drive us toward what it believes is *good* for us, according to its rules or programming.

Because of how awesomely powerful the subconscious mind is, you must work *with* it in order to move forward. Understanding how depression is linked to the subconscious mind, you can see why using the conscious mind alone to get happy has never worked very well, right?

Any unhealthy and outdated programming from your childhood that you are now living your life by can contribute to depression.

This is true even if you had a happy childhood. Simply put, if you are believing, reliving, interpreting, behaving, carrying, or burying anything in your past and it no longer serves you, you are likely disconnected from your naturally joyous self.

In fact, trying to force feeling good without updating our programming can unintentionally work against us, creating a sabotage effect and further depression. But you may not need me to tell you this. You may already know from experience. How many times have you insisted you'll do x , y , or z and then were not able to do it, perpetuating the cycle? You'll be learning how to change this in very effective ways throughout the book. But first, let's look at one of the most important components of depression there is.

What Gets You Stuck: The Freakout Response

When we are buried/burdened by the emotional baggage (aka the stress) of our lives—and are without the tools to unbury ourselves, we are essentially stuck in a prolonged stress response. Hans Selye, a Hungarian doctor, was the first to put explanation to the physiological changes the body experiences when humans are stressed. You might have heard this called *fight, flight, or freeze* response, but I have lovingly coined it the *freakout* response. This happens when the amygdala in the brain responds to danger before the conscious mind registers a threat. This engages other parts of the brain and the nervous system to adapt to that stress. A surge of chemicals accompanies the *freakout* response to help get us through the stressful time. This is all a very primitive process you have no control over.

Let's go over what's going on in the system when this happens so you can get a better idea of how stress affects us and why it