

Zap Your Depression with St. John's Wort, a Centuries Old Medicinal Herb Proven to Make you Smile

By: Julie Wilson, Natural News



An estimated 1-in-10 Americans suffers from depression, with new diagnoses increasing by about 20 percent per year. That same number of people take antidepressant medication, a class of drugs characterized by numerous and unnatural side-effects, including insomnia, decreased libido, weight gain, hallucinations and sometimes violent behavior.

But drugs like Prozac, Zoloft and Paxil aren't the only answer. In fact, some herbal remedies have proven to eliminate, or significantly reduce feelings of depression, without the annoying and sometimes harmful side-effects.

A licensed medical doctor who graduated from UC Davis Medical School, Steven Bratman, MD, is an expert on natural therapies. He's authored several books, including *Beat Depression with St. John's Wort*, which comparatively examines the benefits and health effects of antidepressants and herbal medicine, particularly focusing on the usefulness of the St. John's wort herb for treating depression.

Bratman writes:

More effective than antidepressants

As a physician who practices a blend of alternative and conventional medicine, I have observed over the years that some alternative treatments really work, while others seem to be little more than wishful thinking. A large part of my task as a responsible professional is to sort through the

innumerable treatment options and provide a clear view of which ones are truly helpful.

St. John's wort is one such useful treatment. Not only is the scientific data supporting it reasonably good, my clinical experiences and those of numerous other practitioners using the herb in daily practice have convinced me that St. John's wort is a splendid option for mild to moderate depression.

Every year, millions of Americans seek treatment for depression, complaining of symptoms that interfere with their relationships, impair their work capacity, and deprive them of the full emotional experiences of life.

Treatment for depression was revolutionized in the late 1980s with the production of Prozac, the first antidepressant drug truly appropriate for mild to moderate depression. Breaking all previous records for the use of antidepressants, Prozac quickly achieved what can only be described as cult status.

*"Tess," a patient made famous in Peter Kramer's *Listening to Prozac*, called herself Ms. Prozac, because she believed the drug gave her "charisma, courage, character, and social competency." So positive was Prozac's image for a time, it was widely called vitamin P.*

Its side-effects lead to taking more drugs

*Then a backlash set in; Prozac was found to be not nearly so side-effect-free as the manufacturer had suggested. A freedom-of-information request by psychiatrist Peter Breggin, author of *Talking Back to Prozac*, uncovered the fact that only 286 people, out of a reported 1,730, had completed the full side-effects studies prior to the release of Prozac.*

Real-life experiences revealed that Prozac (and similar drugs) frequently caused unpleasant symptoms ranging from merely annoying to absolutely intolerable.

Many patients on Prozac develop insomnia so severe that they must take a second drug at night to sleep. Women frequently complain of decreased libido and the inability to experience orgasm. Other common problems include anxiety, agitation, severe headaches, undesired weight loss, tremors, sweating, and short-term memory loss.

St. John's wort is a go-to for treating depression in Germany

Interestingly, when the United States embraced Prozac, a completely different course was taken in Germany. Instead of turning to a new prescription drug, physicians there rediscovered an ancient treatment: the herb St. John's wort. Today, only 2 percent of the antidepressant prescriptions in Germany are written for Prozac; St. John's wort dominates the field.

As one patient said, "Taking St. John's wort was like filling a lake drop by drop. Almost without my being aware of it, the emptiness and hopelessness were gradually replaced by a quiet sense of calm. Taking Prozac was like being shot in the face with a firehose."

Gentler treatments are almost always worth trying before more disruptive ones. But the significance of St. John's wort's effectiveness is not limited to its gentleness. In terms of raw performance, St. John's wort sometimes outperforms all drugs available for treatment of

depression.

If the crushed flowers of St. John's wort are steeped in vegetable oil for several weeks, the liquid takes on deep red tones that fluoresce in sunlight. The fluorescent constituent is a chemical named hypericin, and it is this substance that is most commonly cited as the herb's active ingredient.

However, this has not been conclusively proved. Like all herbs, St. John's wort contains innumerable organic chemicals in varying concentrations. It is perfectly possible that another ingredient, or combination of ingredients, is actually responsible for the antidepressant effect.

What Was It Used for Historically?

*From the times of the ancient Greeks, plants of the genus *Hypericum* have been used for a variety of medicinal purposes, such as healing burns and other skin injuries, counteracting snake bite, treating ulcers, and improving the flow of urine. St. John's wort was used in Celtic religious practices in England, and subsequently the herb took on an unofficial spiritual significance among Christians.*

*European herbalists frequently called it *Fuga daemonum*, in reference to widespread belief that St. John's wort could drive away demons.*

Sources:

Bratman, S. (1997) *Beat depression with St. John's wort*: Prima Pub.