



Coping with Depression

Depression and drug use

Commentary

Psychiatrists, therapists and clients are divided on the benefits and drawbacks of using medication to treat people with profound depression or anxiety. This film explores three personal experiences of using prescription drugs and self-medication.

Stephen Fry

It wouldn't be right to say that I've chosen to steer clear of using drugs. It would be right to say that I've chosen to steer clear of using pharmaceutical preparations that are designed for the, that are designed to help people in my condition. I, I, I'm afraid I self-medicated rather badly in the '80s and in the early '90s and through the '90s, actually, with cocaine and alcohol which is a very common thing to do. The fact is if you have a mood disorder and there is some drug available that can guarantee a particular mood then it's very tempting. If you're very low, then an upper like cocaine can appear very helpful. Of course, what happens is that you go up and the crash is even lower. You can't live on it forever and alcohol sort of supposedly counterbalances it. Fortunately I was never quite so, so er lost in those, er those bad things as some people have been. And I was able to come out of that. But food and other such things, anything, you know, you do so much to try and solace yourself, what you think is reward yourself. But of course, it's always a form of terrible punishment.

Jim Brown

I needed to be hospitalised. The medication definitely helped me get back into a sort of a semblance of a normal daily routine. And by the end of the week I felt, I felt fit enough to leave, although I was still, still by no means fully fit. But it was ... I think at the time that was the only really option for me. And it did definitely help.

Stephen Fry

On the odd occasion I've been put on regiments of lithium which I've tried and various other, um various other drugs, anti-psychotics and er, and SSRIs, as they're called – you know the family of serotonin uptake re-inhibitors. Well, I just found that they, they did something to me that I didn't like. They did make me feel better in the mood but they didn't make me feel better in self. And one of the um crucial distinctions to be made in any, in any mental condition is, is whether um a disorder is a mood disorder or a personality disorder.

It may sound like one is playing with words, but actually there is a big difference as to what one's personality is, one's inner self, but it can be, it can be changed or appear to be changed to one's self and to others by, by either an illness like schizophrenia or by a certain kinds of drug and I'm one of those who, for good or ill; would rather be unhappy and myself than, than be happy and someone else.

Trisha Goddard

I didn't take medication. I didn't have medication. I refused it because I was breastfeeding. Breastfeeding really tethered me to the planet at that time. At one stage I was going from one breastfeed to the next and I was very adamant that I didn't want any medication to be passed onto my daughter. I had a lot of talking therapies. I had relaxation therapy which was alien to me. Relax, what's that? You know, so, um, no I didn't have medication until many years later and um, I have to say coming off that medication was one of the worst experiences in my life. It was horrific, absolutely horrific, and I didn't know what was happening to me. So I wouldn't say to people, don't have medication. I would say to them, don't come off it yourself. I had a doctor supervising me coming off it, but I had to come off it very, very quickly in order to fulfil the job, actually, which was my chat show in England, the first job I'd had in three years. But, um, I would say to people, that medication alone is not the answer. It absolutely is not the answer.

Jim Brown

I really don't think that medicalising these problems really is the answer. I think we need to accept, as a society, that people do struggle, and that life is a struggle for lots of people. And it needs to be made okay ... that life is a struggle. And I think the problem arises when we decide we're gonna make it into something medical.

Stephen Fry

I don't take medical treatments, medications, as the Americans call it, and we seem to call it now. But what I do now instead of self-medicating by illegal drugs and lots of alcohol is, I self-medicate by accessing my own endorphins and enkephalins in one kind or another by exercising a lot, which is something I never thought I would say. But I go to the gym three or four times a week, and I walk every day four or five miles and I walk into town here and I live in North London and I walk into the West End, four or five miles every morning, and I really enjoy it and I feel the benefit. When I first lost a lot of weight it was, to say it was as if a weight had rolled off me – it was that a weight had rolled off me – but subsequently once that had happened and I started going to the gym then it was as if another kind of weight started to roll off me, a more interior weight

Trisha Goddard

Whether you like it or not, you can ... you can talk all the rubbish you like, whether you like it or not, let's deal with what is proven. Food affects mood. Fact. You know that from eating a piece of chocolate and what it does to you. So stodgy or bad – 'bad' food if you like – a lot of too much of the wrong food, too much alcohol will affect your mood. Lack of movement will affect your mood. Fact. Walking, what have you, what the good Lord created us to do, but fast walking, something to raise your heart beat, kick off those endorphins, will help as well. Talking therapies, different talking therapies for some people, cognitive behavioural therapy, for other people psychotherapy, whatever it might be. It might be goal-orientated, or talking about the past, but for many people, talking to someone about maybe how everything started or the patterns that they see in their lives, or the past what have you, that will help as well. And medication. I do believe medication has to be part of the equation and not the story.