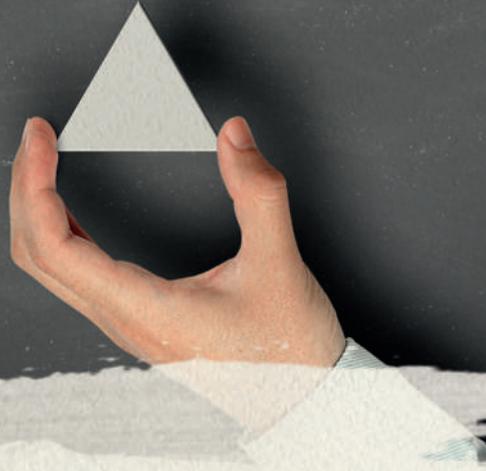


PHYSICAL MENTAL



The Spice of Life

by Michelle Roque O'Neil

I've spent a great deal of my professional life helping people to change their perspective; from inward to outward, isolated to inclusive, disenchanted to passionate. The spice of life is a metaphor for that element of life that keeps you inspired and generates a sense of joy. It is sometimes easily eroded, and long term this can spiral into depression.

Life in the 21st century can be intense and demanding; our 24/7 lifestyles are often hectic and without space or time to assimilate the happenings of the day. Modern digital culture makes us available at all times and often communication with others is reliant on mobile phones and social media, and for many, gone are the communal activities that once were part of life. This can make life isolating because of this lack of real human exchange and personal contact. The more we make ourselves available to the demands of our external lives, the more that challenges and expectations arise.

Our lives can easily become a series of targets and processes without any beginnings, middles or endings, and leave us with no real sense of achievement. With no time to assimilate any experiences, let alone acknowledge successes, we're left feeling like we are not enough. Constant demands and high expectations can create a hostile, aggressive and competitive environment which can be isolating and pressured and difficult to navigate. Our response to these demands can become

emotionally charged and often based on an emotional vocabulary gathered through life, often colored by deep emotional impressions.

Essentially, a person can grow up in a loving family and have a happy childhood or though as they move through life they find that their expectations aren't realized, they become frustrated and cut off. Careers don't materialize, living standards shift and relationships become hard to hold or initiate; soon they feel as if they're imprisoned in a box that they can't see out of. It's often these external expectations that can create the pressures at the root of depression, materializing in a disconnected sense of self and belonging. Loneliness is a major contributor to the problem especially in large cities, or through relocation due to work, being away from family, familiar surroundings and friends; combined with extended working hours this can leave little time to orientate and engage with new surroundings.

There are many triggers that can erode our sense of self worth and belonging in the world. Often actions that seem positive can be a subtle inhibitor. Job success seems positive but competitive demands can mean one can become too fixated and driven. Financially it brings with it standards and expectations to live up to. Emotionally we can become driven, fuelled by inner fears that create silent internal pressure. Performance can become a heady drug often driven by a thirst for power, and by ego but at its core is often poor self worth. All

of this impacts on our sense of identity, which can sometimes get lost managing other peoples expectations.

This fixation on constantly being reactive and taking action can result in imbalance over time, both mentally and biochemically, particularly if we have a genetic predisposition towards stress. If we are constantly in a state of high adrenal alert, very soon the effects of adrenaline and excessive levels of cortisol will take its toll... sooner or later the elastic will SNAP!

In a recent survey it was discovered that 70% of doctor's waiting rooms were filled with people with mental health issues. It is estimated that 20% of the worlds population have experienced depression and mental health issues at some point in their lives. In America over 30 million Americans are on anti-depressants. When we turn to China, depression has risen significantly and is growing; in 2012, 326 million anti-depressants were sold. This is a sharp 26.6% rise in comparison with 2011, or even 7 years earlier when only a few thousand were sold. Statistics show that a whopping \$5 billion has been spent on managing depression in China in recent years.

In China there are several external factors that seem to contribute to the problem, such as disintegration of extended family, physical separation, job relocation and long working hours. Other pressures are arising such as work related drinking and binge-drinking, sometimes

aromatherapy

the spice of life

3-4 times in a week - this may have become part of the company's expectation and part of the job application. Sadly alcoholism is on the rise too. Culturally, depression is a fairly new phenomenon, and to a certain extent, one that people find difficult to admit to, and sometimes with a sense of shame and weakness. Rather than turning to traditional and natural methods, depression is often managed through a cocktail of various medications.

Stress can play a major factor in the downward spiral towards depression; its many side effects can cause an alteration in biochemistry due to high levels of cortisol and adrenalin, compounded by a lack of sleep and poor nutrition, through a lacking appetite. Evidence suggests that people are more susceptible to depression where they have experienced stressful events. Depression shares many symptoms of chronic stress such as appetite changes, erratic sleep patterns, poor concentration, addiction, feelings of worthlessness, a sense of not belonging or not wanting to be here.

The fear factor can accelerate depression as stress is often fuelled by belief systems that we invest energy in, and this can be attributed to one of the following: a fear of abandonment, rejection, feeling out of control, powerlessness, hopelessness and helplessness. Combine this with environmental factors such as pollution, congestion, expanding population, over-stimulation and electromagnetic overload. Cultural factors play a part such as the loss of traditions, losing a sense of ones identity, a sense of separation, material expectations and the pressure to keep up. Hereditary factors also need to be accounted for, which are absorbed during gestations, held within the DNA or imprinted through trauma; it's not hard to see how people could become depressed.

When overseeing exams in China recently I repeatedly heard symptoms of stress among the people receiving treatments - gut and shoulder, headaches, high blood pressure, sadness, pressure due to excessive workloads. One student said to me that as a woman the burden of having to exceed expectations and do better than men is great - an all too familiar mantra at the root of a lot of mental health issues

in the West too. In fact it has become a global phenomenon. In Mumbai there are reports of extreme weeping and severe melancholy, both calling cards of depression affecting 10% of the population. Similarly, mild anxiety and depression is now the most common mental disorder in Britain.

So what is the way back? There is no easy fix... but, with gentleness, sensitivity and guidance, a path can be navigated back to a sense of belonging and identity. Aromatherapy offers a valuable tool and a safe framework in which an individual can find a way back. With aromatherapy we can work on many levels through aroma, touch and breath. The holistic nature of aromatherapy

can gently and subtly coax physical depletion and fragility back into balance. With this the mind becomes more positive, and over time becomes profoundly transformative.

Aromatherapy works on the autonomic nervous system. It is stimulated via pressures along the spinal ganglia to elicit a release at a deep subconscious level. The magic of this has always struck me as it only ever brings to the surface what the individual is ready to face. When people are depressed, touch and nurture can support a deeper sense of trust and support. When you combine this with the correct synergy of oils it reaches down through the limbic system on a cellular level. The emotional body energetically works on this cellular level and holds a vast library of emotions and the right combination can work to fortify and support the understanding of fragile emotional issues.

Essential oils are dynamic, potent, cellular and, most of all, multi-dimensional; patience and sensitivity is required as a treatment can effect us on many levels, in the same way that trauma and depression can impact on different levels; therefore a 'less is more' approach is necessary. This way a skilled therapist can determine the correct protocol. The treatments for mental illness come in many different forms and will inform the way you touch, speak and the oils you choose.

By looking at the body from a four dimensional perspective, physical, emotional, mental and spiritual, we can often see the path of dis-ease... Our bones reflect the mineral

kingdom, this is where fixed ideas and a sense of impotence and inflexibility lie. They can relate to fundamental beliefs regarding survival and a sense of belonging. Aroma relates to the plant kingdom and works at a cellular level and helps to heal emotional trauma, our relationship to the world, plus others. Touch links to the animal kingdom and works with the mental body to empower our sense of identity. The synergy of the above works on the human level through the circulation and the heart to connect with self-expression, forgiveness and self-love.

A lovely exercise that I do with my students is to do a blind intuitive assessment of a few essential oils, a mixture of top, middle and base notes. I first guide them into a relaxed receptive state and then begin to pass around the oils with no prompts about what the oils are, they are simply asked that they experience them intuitively and emotionally rather than intellectually, to not grasp or try to guess what they are. To fully experience them connecting with your senses, intuition, your heart and body, it provides you with a whole new appreciation of oils that we can sometimes take for granted; it's amazing to gain insight into sometimes invisible and subtle nuances.

I like to think of top notes as your invitation or introduction, as they can be awakening, dynamic and refreshing and have an immediate impact. Middle notes stir the heart and work at a core level to shift, open and cajole. Base notes work at a foundation level to underpin, stabilize and release. When you combine this with your intuitive data, your own personal blend can have influences on many levels. Try it!

Our world is complex, congested and demanding. It is also beautiful, inspiring and enriching. Depression is not a problem that should be ignored; getting to the root of the problem is imperative. The question is, do you tune people out or tune them in? I am glad to know that there are softer ways to support depression, ways in which tension can be eased, and scripts rewritten. Essential oils are miraculous tools for change and well-being. Taking time to understand the myriad of impressions, influences and layers that underpin a problem is key, most of all treating an individual with patience and respect, which is paramount.



Michelle Roque O'Neil is the current vice Chair of the International Federation of Aromatherapists. Michelle is the founder of Roques O'Neil. For over 3 decades she has practiced the powerful healing art of Aromatherapy, as part of a repertory of ancient and 21st Century know-how. Ranked by Vogue as one of the Top 10 Aromatherapists in the world and a Reiki master, her signature approach combines the principles of Aromatherapy, cellular release, acupressure, reiki, reflexology and the ideals of Qi energy-balancing to potent effect. If you would like more information about professional aromatherapy, are interested in training to become an aromatherapist or would like to find a qualified aromatherapy practitioner in your area please go to the International Federation of Aromatherapists (IFA) website at www.ifaroma.org or email at office@ifaroma.org.

