

# My Friend Bob

I have a friend - let's just call him Bob - who's depressed.

Now, I'm not talking about the I'm so bummed and blue, my dog ran off with my pick-up, my wife and my best friend kind of funk. .

No, Bob's got the real deal – bipolar disorder they call it, aka manic-depression. So, even if his dog brings back the truck and his wife, and he gets a new best friend, the funk doesn't magically flee. Bob's still depressed. Some of the time. But not always.

And that's the rub. Because what really drives Bob crazy (well, more than he already is) is how the media makes it all sound so simple.



First, the news media. Every year on national depression day there's another inspiring celebrity depression confessional. It's a moving article about how a celeb "came down" with depression, but after a courageous battle, as well as perseverance and treatment, gets cured – and a new TV sit-com. It's a nice story, but hardly the full story: the celeb has a health insurance policy with a two cent deductible and full coverage for a 30

day stay at a "wellness" spa. You too can get better provided your insurance covers mental health services – if you have insurance at all.

Then we have the ads, "Do you wake up in the morning and want to get under the bed instead of out of it? When you look at your apartment's dirty windows do you think about jumping through one rather than cleaning it, then rule it out since you live on the first floor? You may be depressed." (Ya think?) "Ask your doctor about Feelgoodaril." Pretty soon you'll be dancing in a field of butterflies and singing to the critters like Sleeping Beauty in the forest.

Sounds good to me. While I'm there I'll ask the doc for some Singular and Cialis too. Then, I'll be happy, with clear sinuses, and ready to score.

Ahh, were it that simple.

So, depressed Bob asked me to fill in some what's left out of the celebrity success stories and the advertised pharmaceutical miracles (and, remind you he is neither a physician nor a mental health professional).

First and foremost, you can't cure depression. You can only treat it -- more specifically, you can treat the symptoms. No one really knows what causes depression, other than speculating that the chemistry set in your brain has something mixed-up or missing.

Medicine typically works – or not. And no one really knows why. Sometimes, it makes the darkness go away in a couple of weeks.

But if the first drug doesn't work, you might be prescribed another – and sometimes the second doesn't work. Or the third. Be prepared for some potentially rough times. Trying to find a solution can be frustrating, exasperating and depressing in itself – and can take weeks, even months.

Most importantly, when you start feeling better, don't stop taking your medicine because you feel better. Duh. You think it might be the medicine?

No avoiding this one: the effective drug may have side effects. You might have to choose between the lesser of two evils. Is feeling better (“normal”) worth gaining a little weight? Or, when you're sitting in your bathtub, watching the sunset, it might not be a matter of the right time. It might be more like when it is the right time will I be up for it?

If you have symptoms of depression, see a specialist. Yes, your family doctor has some training in treating depression, but if you break a bone, you go to an orthopedic surgeon. So if your psyche needs tweaking, see a psychiatrist.

You have to be comfortable and confident with your shrink; if not find another. Just be sure you're not shopping for easier solutions.

Drugs alone may not work. Bob recommends therapy as well. Counseling can help you work through things getting in the way of treatment – things you've done, haven't done, or had done to you.

Exercise is a must. Yes, if you're depressed, who wants to go to the gym? Make yourself. You'll feel better.

There are other treatments – some seemingly a bit bizarre but promising: massive amounts of fish oil, a supplement called Sam-e, Folic acid, Vitamin B Complex, light therapy and more.

And finally Bob wants to remind you: Hang in there. Don't give up. No one said finding a treatment that works is easy. Just ask someone with cancer.