

# D Straight Talk About DEPRESSION

THE FACTS ABOUT THE  
LATEST NON-DRUG  
TREATMENT OPTION

by Dr. Bradley T. Wajda



Everyone has heard the term “depression,” and many of us have wondered if we’ve had it during episodes of feeling down or sad. Most of the time, these feelings are short-lived and pass within a couple of days, but when they begin to interfere with the activities of daily life, it’s considered a problem requiring attention. For a variety of reasons, many people with a depressive illness never seek treatment, and often that reason is a failure to recognize that they have the symptoms.

For those leery of seeking help because they think medication is the only option, a safe and effective new treatment called TMS (transcranial magnetic stimulation) is being offered locally.

It is important to realize that depression is not a character flaw or personal weakness, but a well-recognized medical condition. In her newly released book entitled “3,000 Pulses – Surviving Depression with TMS Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation,” Martha Rhodes gives an insightful description of her depression: “At that moment, my pain felt equal to – if not even more than – what I imagined any physical illness could pose. The constant anxiety, sadness, fear, and despair strangled me. I felt inexorably alone and as if I were dying a slow death of emotional asphyxiation. I may not have been diagnosed with incurable cancer of a vital organ, but I knew I was in the throes of battle with what felt like cancer of my soul.”

*It is important to realize that depression is not a character flaw or personal weakness, but a well-recognized medical condition.*

Symptoms of depression can be caused by stressful life events like divorce or job loss, medical illness, substance abuse, genetic factors, or for no clear identifiable reason. Major Depression affects all age groups. Women are at a greater risk than men for developing symptoms, and someone with a parent that suffers from depression is roughly three times as likely to suffer from it. Often times, major depression occurs with other mental illnesses like post traumatic stress disorder, as well as with substance abuse.

To receive a diagnosis of major depression, at least five of the following symptoms must be present for at least two weeks: a depressed mood (irritability in children/adolescents), a loss of the ability to enjoy pleasurable activities, a loss of energy, having difficulty concentrating, significant weight gain or loss, insomnia or too much sleep, thoughts of death or suicide, feeling worthless or guilty, and restlessness or moving slowly. Other symptoms include social isolation, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and even psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions.

Steps one can take to help prevent depression include exercise, good sleep habits, avoiding alcohol or drugs, engaging in pleasurable activities, and getting involved in social activities, preferably with positive people. If the symptoms of depression persist, seeking treatment is necessary.

The earlier treatment begins the more effective it will be. The first step is to see a doctor or psychiatrist so they can rule out treatable medical causes for depression by completing a physical exam, interview and laboratory tests.

Traditionally, treatment for depression has been to provide the best combination of talk therapy and medication. When indicated, there are more advanced treatments like electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), vagus nerve stimulation (VNS), and transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). Of these more advanced treatments, VNS is a surgical procedure and ECT requires general anesthesia. However, TMS is a relatively new and novel approach to treating depression that is both safe and effective while allowing the patient to

remain comfortably awake in the doctor's office. Approved by the FDA in 2008, TMS is a non-drug, non-invasive therapy based on MRI technology.

For patients for whom anti-depressants are not an option, either due to the side effects, lack of effectiveness after years of use, or pregnancy, TMS is an option that has been confirmed effective by clinical trials. One study found that almost 68 percent of patients treated with TMS reported a successful outcome.

Using short pulses of magnetic energy to stimulate nerve cells in the area of the brain thought to control mood, TMS therapy is an outpatient procedure available by prescription only. It is safe and easy on the body, and has none of the systemic side effects commonly associated with anti-depressant medications.

TMS requires about 40 minutes per session, and many patients see positive results within three to four weeks. Most sessions occur five times a week for a period of six weeks.

TMS was once an elite treatment used only at leading medical institutions, but it is now available in Fresno. In my practice, I have found it to be a very useful addition to the many tools I use to treat depression. If you believe you might be suffering from depression, it is important to consult a doctor or mental health professional to determine the correct diagnosis for your symptoms, followed by the correct treatment. 📌

---

*During his 25 years practicing in the Central Valley, Dr. Bradley T. Wajda has amassed extensive experience in adult and child psychiatry, as well as a comprehensive substance abuse treatment. His Fresno practice, Esano Health, represents his most recent endeavor to enhance the scope of mental health services available to the general public through a range of treatment options that are personalized to the needs of each individual.*

---