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Letter to the Editor

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Hydrotherapy: an efficient and cost-effective treatment for depression

Sir,

Depression is a general mental disorder with an estimate of 350 million people affected with it. Depression varies from usual mood fluctuations to short emotional setbacks and can extend to mental breakdown, hopelessness and suicidal thoughts. At worst, over 800,000 people commit suicide due it, and is the major cause of death among Factors including genetic characteristics, environmental stress, as it gets triggered later at some point of adolescence, drugs like isotretinoin and interferon-alpha are thought to increase the risk of depression. It is believed that a single gene do not contribute to the onset of depression and anxiety rather a group of genes. Whereas depression has been widely accepted and treatments have been introduced, TRD (treatment resistant depression) is a case of Major depressive disorder (MDD) which does not adequately respond to the typical treatment i.e. anti depressants. Therefore, other methods in psychotherapy should be applied and taken into consideration.

Hydrotherapy is one of the natural methods of treatment extensively used in the array of natural medicinal therapies. When body initially touches cold water, the initial shock of cold water is very stimulating as the cold and wet causes skin surface vessels to constrict and draw blood away from them to conserve heat. The brain and vital organs get fresh oxygen nutrient from blood. Skin surface contains cold receptors, 3-30 times more than warm receptors. This is the main reason, why body invigorates with the sudden touch of cold water as it contributes in vasoconstriction and exerting pressure on receptors hence making brain function more quickly.

Studies show that cold water exposure to different parts of the body for different time intervals have drastic effects on body and majorly contributes towards active brain function. One hour full body water immersion (WI) at different temperatures showed different effects. At 32C, it lowered heart rate by 15%, systolic blood pressure by 11% and diastolic blood pressure by 12%. In addition, cold water therapy is the example of stress induced analgesia and is expected to "crowd out" or suppress psychosis related neurotransmission within mesolimbic system.²

Short term and sudden cold water treatment result in the same reaction of the body, as in Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), exclusive of side effects like seizures and memory loss caused by ECT. Limited and entire body immersion in cold water has shown the induce assembly of beta-endorphin, the neurotransmitter which are conscientious for producing the sense of comfort and suppression of pain via opioid receptors.³

Sudden cold shower can be stressing and uncomfortable for the body. Therefore, 2-3 min of adaptation period can be taken into consideration to make body get used to it. A cold water shower with adaptation period can still be shocking enough for the body to result in vasoconstriction and lifting up the mood. It is advised that a relatively medium cool water shower be taken at evening.

Syed Zawahir Hassan*, Muhammad Waqas, Danial Yaqub, Duhaa Asad

Sindh Medical College, Dow university of Health Science, Karachi, Pakistan

*Correspondence to:

Dr. Syed Zawahir Hassan, E-mail: drzawahir@gmail.com

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