



Beating those blues

In June, Jane Landman attended the most inspiring life event she had ever experienced — the sixth Happiness and its Causes conference. In a series summarising the conference, Jane begins by discussing a presentation given by psychologist and author Dr Sarah Edelman.

Everyone feels sad or 'blue' from time to time. These feelings are usually triggered by a loss or disappointment — things go wrong, people let us down, we fail to get something we want or lose something precious. Often these feelings pass in a short space of time but if they don't, they could develop into a more serious depression. Symptoms include having a depressed mood for much of the day, reduced interest in pleasurable activities, changes in appetite and weight, changes in sleep patterns, lack of energy, feelings of guilt or worthlessness, agitation, inability to make decisions or concentrate, recurrent thoughts of death or suicide. About 12 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women experience an episode of major depression at some stage in their lives.

Dr Edelman says depression is caused by a combination of biology (disturbances in neurotransmitter functioning), history (e.g. family conflict, alcohol use, early parental loss or neglect), psychological factors (personality style, low self-esteem), environmental factors (stressful events, job, money or health problems) and social factors (loneliness, relationship difficulties).

Depressed people often display faulty or unreasonable thinking such as seeing things in black and white with no middle ground, making sweeping negative conclusions, like — I always screw up, expecting things always to be fair, assuming that one knows what others are thinking; shoulds — I should be 100 per cent competent in every area and similar types of thinking.

To break the vicious cycle of depression, there are things we can do. One of the simplest is to be active though it can be very difficult to initiate activity when feeling like doing nothing.

Pushing ourselves to be active, even when we can't be

bothered, can often increase motivation. It is important to let 'down' moods take control. If we are inclined to stay in bed, we need to get out of it.

Timetabling positive events is a very effective depression-busting thing to do. These include activities that give us pleasure such as talking on the phone, listening to music or working on a hobby.

Activities that give us a sense of achievement are also very effective such as getting out of bed before 9am, mowing the lawn, cleaning out a cupboard or spare room, helping someone.

Physical exercise can be as effective as anti-depressant medication for resolving mild to moderate depression. This may work by boosting endorphins (our body's natural feel good substance), or increasing serotonin (feel good neurotransmitter).

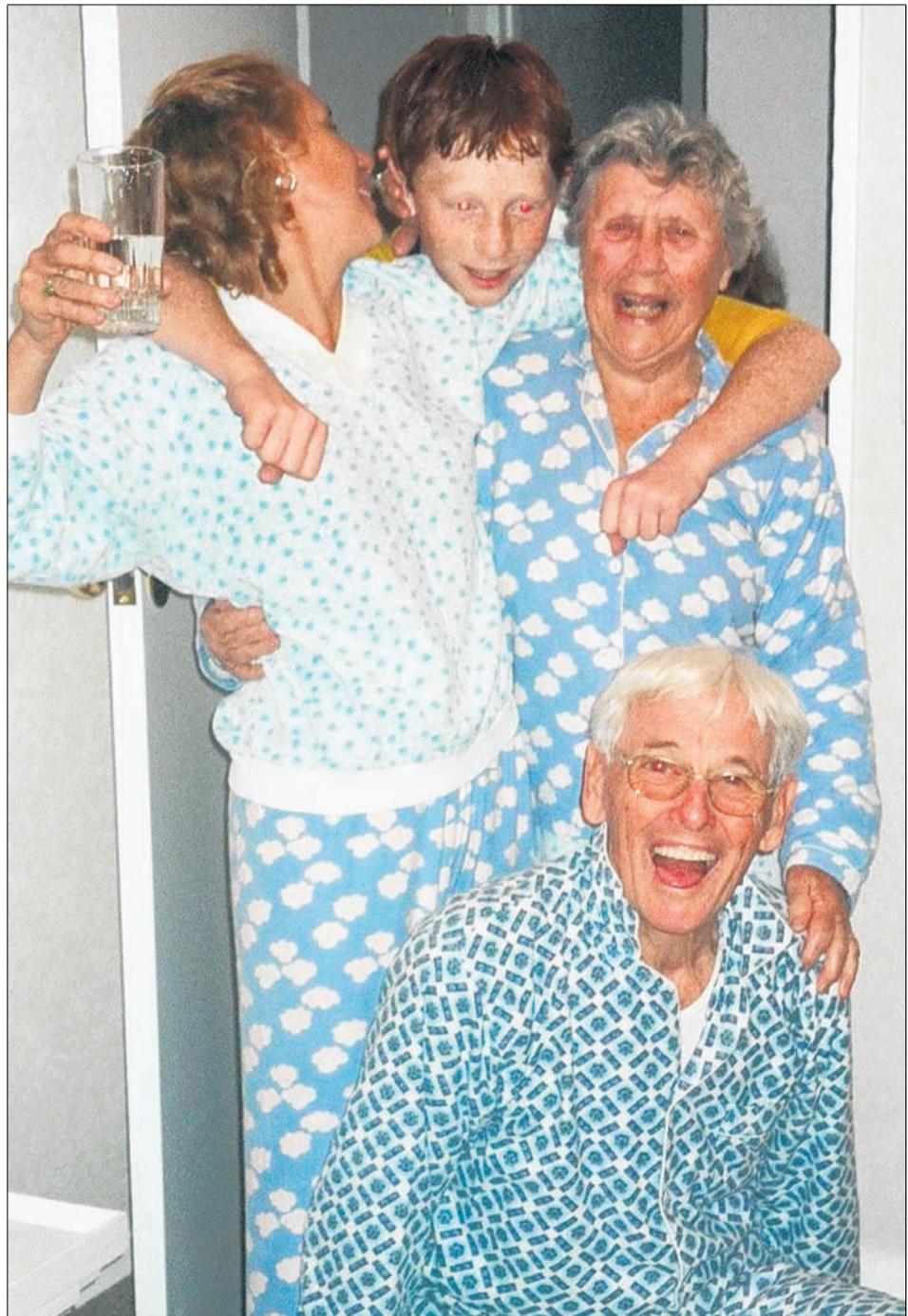
Another effective activity is mindfulness meditation which is the process of focusing one's attention on current, moment to moment experience enabling us to step back from negative thoughts while observing them as objects in our awareness. Attention can be fixed on anything from thoughts, emotions, body sensations, sounds or objects.

The trick is to observe one's thoughts and emotions with an attitude of curiosity and acceptance rather than challenging or judging the content. It also builds tolerance of upsetting emotions.

By observing, not resisting, painful emotions, paradoxically suffering diminishes. The other great thing about mindfulness meditation is that it can be done anywhere, any time in the bath, eating or cleaning.

Avoiding social interaction is common with depression. While curling up into our shell makes us feel safe, it also gives us more opportunity to dwell on our perceived problems.

The more we ruminate, the worse we feel. Letting people



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**BE HAPPY:
Laughter is the
best medicine.**

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know we are depressed can relieve some of the pressure and sometimes brings additional support.

Doing things with people such as going for a walk or to the movies also helps to take our minds off our troubles. Like physical exercise, we may need to "force" ourselves to do these things, especially in the beginning.

If we have suffered from depression in the past, there is an increased likelihood that we may experience it again. Building personal resilience can decrease the severity of

depression. Building our social networks is especially important, such as joining a club or taking a course. It also helps to develop our interests and passions.

When we are in a state of total immersion in an activity that is satisfying and meaningful we are barely conscious of things around us such as other people's presence or the passing of time.

Doing what we love absorbs us in this way and also gives protection against depression. We sometimes need to explore different activities to uncover our passions. A balanced

lifestyle helps reduce risk, try to spend time and energy in the following areas: work, play, mind (intellect and spirit), health and relationships.

A relapse plan can help if we begin to feel low as it is easier to head depression off at the beginning of an episode.

Have a plan that suits — it may include things like: increasing physical exercise, talking to someone close about how we are feeling, increasing social activities and being aware of negative ruminations (remind ourselves that it is just a thought).

Make sure you get the chance to have your say

Have you enrolled to vote yet?

If you are 18 or over and didn't get an enrolment form in the mail, you aren't enrolled to vote. Don't worry though — you can pop into Waimarie to collect an enrolment pack. We are happy to help you

fill this in. If you prefer, you can Freetext your name and address to 3676, get a form from a PostShop or call Freephone 0800 3676 56.

Enrolling to vote is the first step to participating in the election, which gives

voters their chance to have their say on who runs the country. And this year, it's more important than ever. Not only will New Zealand be voting for the politicians and political parties who will lead the country, we'll also be voting on the

system we use to choose those politicians.

More information about enrolling and voting is available at elections.org.nz and details about the referendum can be found at referendum.org.nz.

So spread the word.