

Reading Level: 5-6 Interest Level: 4-6

NEW FALL 2023!

Bring Science Home

Can you cook a pizza using just the power of the sun? Can biodiversity be measured in your backyard? Is there science in art and music? Science can answer so many questions! In this continuing series presented by *Scientific American*, readers discover the answers to these questions and many more as they explore the science of STEAM, the environment, animals, plants, and even making dessert! Each experiment or activity begins with an explanation of the scientific concept the project will explore. The following step-by-step instructions guide young scientists through the project and help them draw scientific conclusions from their results.

- Materials are often easily gathered from around the home or classroom
- Many projects are marked for use in a science fair and include further experimentation ideas
- STEM concepts tie into middle school science curricula
- A concluding section describes the scientific method in detail

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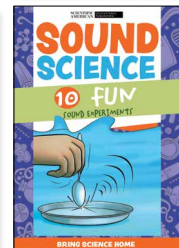
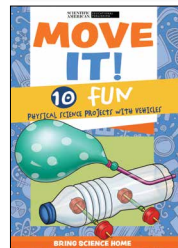
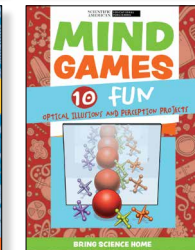
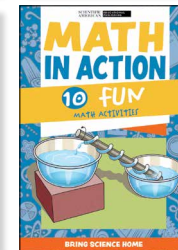
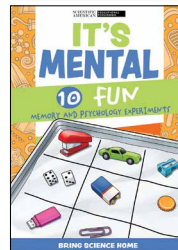
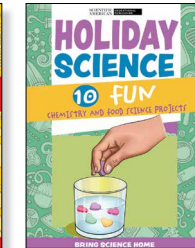
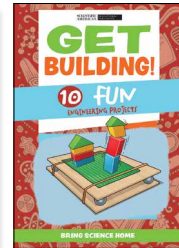
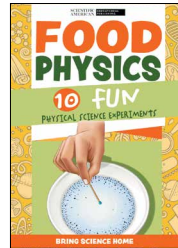
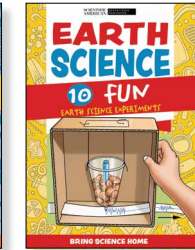
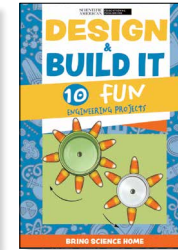
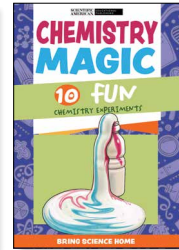
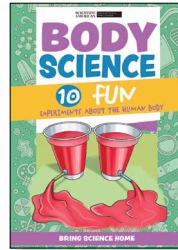
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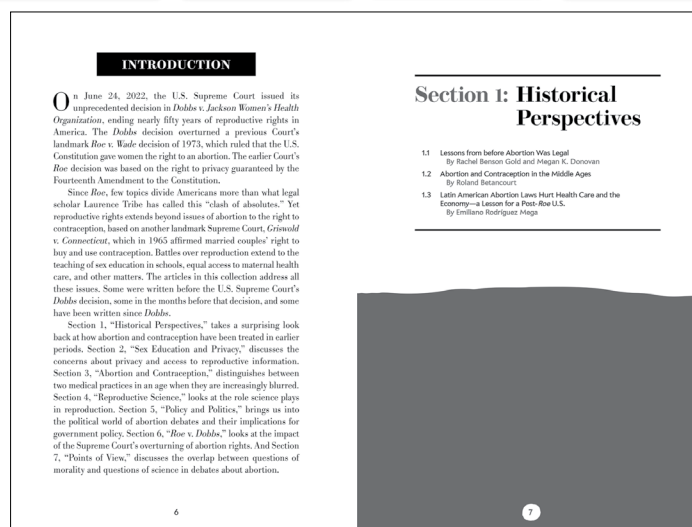
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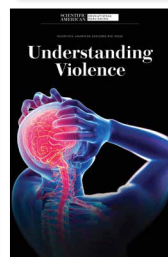
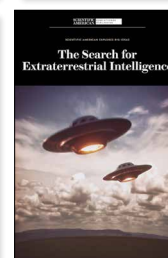
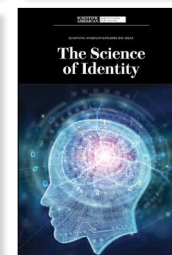
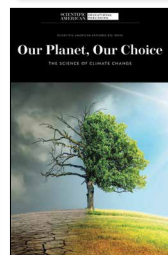
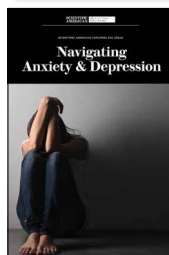
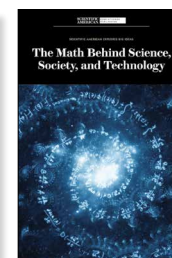
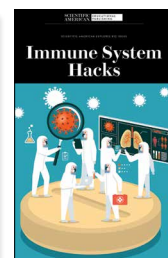
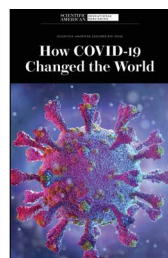
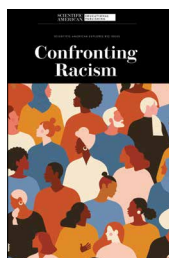
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Evolution Could Explain Why Psychotherapy May Work for Depression

By Gary Saks

A consensus has emerged in recent years that psychotherapy—in particular, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)—rate comparably to medications such as Prozac and Lexapro as treatments for depression. Either option, or the two together, may at times alleviate the mood disorder. In looking more closely at both treatments, CBT—which delves into dysfunctional thinking patterns—may have a benefit that could make it the better choice for a patient.

The reason may be rooted in our deep evolutionary past. Scholars suggest humans may become depressed to help us focus attention on a problem that might cause someone to fall out of step with family, friends, clan or the larger society—an outcast status that, especially in Paleolithic times, would have meant an all-but-certain tragic fate. Depression, by this account, came about as a mood state to make us think long and hard about behaviors that may have caused us to become despondent because some issue in our lives is socially problematic.

A recent article in *American Psychologist*, the flagship publication of the American Psychological Association, weighs what the possible evolutionary origins of depression might mean for arguments about the merits of psychotherapy versus antidepressants. In the article, Steven D. Hollon, a professor of psychology at Vanderbilt University, explores the implications of helping a patient come to grips with the underlying causes of a depression—which is the goal of CBT, and is also in line with an evolutionary explanation. The analysis effects of an antidepressant, by contrast, may divert a patient from engaging in the reflective process for which depression evolved—a reason perhaps that psychotherapy appears to produce a more enduring effect than antidepressants. *Scientific American* spoke with Hollon about his ideas on the topic.

Sector 4: New Therapies and Lifestyle Changes for Anxiety and Depression

[An edited transcript of the interview follows.]

Q: You described in your recent article the idea that humans evolved a propensity toward depression as a means to restore emotional and psychological equilibrium. That allows people to stay well integrated within their social milieus. So, can you explain how depression may be a product of evolution that can actually protect us?

A: In the late 2000s, I read a paper by the evolutionary biologist Paul Andrews. It was masterful, very thoughtful—and I totally disagreed with it. The main premise was that depression was an evolved adaptation that serves to make people ruminate.

Q: Why did you disagree?

A: For clinicians, we think of rumination as a terrible thing that at best is a symptom of depression and at worst leads to something that deepens the depression. We've always thought of it as a kind of exhaust out the tailpipe that is not really helpful.

But the work of Andrews and his colleague J. Andrew (Andy) Thomson recounted that in our evolutionary past, what got you depressed was some kind of major problem—probably a social problem—that might get you excluded from the tribe. And what you had to do is sit down and think about things.

Most of us can think of anxiety as being a useful function, because anxiety takes us away from danger. It's quick, it's rapid, the reaction that occurs after stepping on a snake that might be poisonous when you're out in the woods. But most folks don't think of depression as having any function. It's just something unpleasant. The trick is to figure out what the purpose of depression is—and when Andrews and Thomson looked at what goes on when you get depressed, they found that a lot of energy went to the brain.

And the reason for that is to help us to think more carefully about the things that are going wrong, and first to understand what's the cause. That answers the question: How come I'm