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Election dejection

By CARRIE FERGUSON

Staff Writer

Presidential results left you feeling deflated? Remember, all is not lost

If you're downcast and dejected this morning, so sorry. We'd hug you if we could. It stinks to lose.

Are you so angry you're sputtering and thinking of moving to Switzerland? Sorry about that, too.

But wait, irate, passionate citizen, before you spend weeks ranting about the unfairness and insanity of the election results, here's a little free advice for you: Get a grip and move on.

Anything to help reduce the national nasties — especially if 2004 is anything like 2000, and today we find ourselves counting chads and doing the limbo.

"The election results are important, and yet, on an individual basis, the next day you're still who you are," said psychologist Toni Raiten-D'Antonio, author of the newly released *The Velveteen Principles: A Guide to Becoming Real* (\$14.95 Health Communications, Inc.).

"You can remain who you are with the same politics and values and live those everyday for the rest of your life, actively and regardless of the outcome of the election."

This campaign season — negative in the utmost — many polls showed

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SIGN-UP 

President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry just about evenly split. The tight race didn't give either side a whole lot of time to ready itself for a possible loss. Even with advance notice, though, this is America, where losing is for "other" people. We just don't like defeat.

So, figuring this "day after" would be an emotional hang-over for a good chunk of the electorate — regardless of who won — we turned to people who counsel the angry, the depressed and the stressed.

Help us move on, we pleaded. Gladly, came the reply.

Among the top suggestions of the rational experts: The old saying is, "Think globally. Act locally." Take it to heart.

"Let's say Kerry wins and the Right to Life people are dashed, join a group and educate people about abortion," said Dr. Robert Butterworth, a Los Angeles psychologist and trauma expert. "Say Bush wins and people are upset about the war. Get involved in blogs, or in activities that educate on war.

"Even though your candidate has lost, your ideas haven't changed. Get involved," he added.

There is no entry on political depression in the big book therapists and psychiatrists use to diagnose mental illnesses, but there may as well be. Patients soon will start coming in reporting anger and anxiety over an election loss, Raiten-D'Antonio said.

They feel alienated, surrounded by the enemy. They can't reconcile that more than half of their fellow citizens voted for someone they dislike, or despise, she said.

"I tell them that this is how people have felt after elections since we have had elections," she said.

Time is the healer, the soothing balm, she added.

Peace, acceptance, or a redirection of the dismay will get here sooner if you practice gratitude, said Jon Gordon, author of *Become an Energy Addict: Simple, Powerful Ways to Energize Your Life* (\$21.95, Longstreet Press).

"Be thankful you live in a country that has such a democratic system. You still live in the freest country in the world and the best economy in the world," Gordon said. "Research also shows it is physiologically impossible to be fearful and stressed and thankful at the same time. If you're thankful, you won't be fearful."

Take a walk and create some endorphins. Eat dark chocolate for some more



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endorphins. Pop a B-complex vitamin to clear out stress hormones. Sniff some peppermint to lift the mood and take deep cleansing breaths to induce relaxation.

Give up the illusion of control.

"People have so much invested in the election results. We have egos. We want to win. We want to be in control and having just lived through three or four hurricanes, I was reminded we're not in control," the Florida-based Gordon said. "Hurricanes pass and so do presidents."

If someone on the winning side decides to rub your nose in your candidate's loss, smile and walk away, Gordon said. It's the only way to kill what he calls an "energy vampire."

And don't forget, graciousness is what we all need in these coming days, Raiten-D'Antonio said.

"Be a gracious winner and be a gracious loser," she said. "If you're a winner, behave yourself. Be kind. Show empathy. Don't rub it in somebody's face."

Carrie Ferguson is a Tennessean features writer. She can be reached at cferguson@tennessean.com or 259-8067.

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