

The Many Faces of Depression

Depression is a common condition. There are a variety of types of depression all of which have specific symptoms and levels of severity. Depression is a mood disorder that can affect emotions, thoughts, and daily functioning. It is one of the most commonly reported mental health conditions in the United States. It is prevalent among people of all ages, genders, income levels and educational experience.

There is not one specific cause of depression. Dr. Alison Yarp points out research shows it can be caused by a combination of psychological, genetic, biological, and environmental factors. Depression often surfaces in adulthood but it can also affect children and adolescents. Some risk factors for depression include a family history of depression, major life changes, traumatic events, chronic stress, specific physical conditions and medications.

The following types of depression and their diagnostic criteria are from the fifth edition of the ***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders:***

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is diagnosed when a person has at least five symptoms all day and almost every day for a minimum of two weeks. Symptoms for MDD are depressed mood, decreased interest or enjoyment of daily activities, sleep issues, fatigue or loss of energy, feeling worthless and/or guilty, difficulty concentrating, and thoughts of death or suicide.

Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD) is also known as dysthymia. It is characterized by a depressive mood that is present most of the day, most days, for at least two years. A PDD diagnosis consists of a minimum of two of these symptoms: decreased appetite or overeating, insomnia or sleeping more than usual, low energy, low self-esteem, difficulty concentrating or making decisions and feeling hopeless.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a form of depression that occurs seasonally. Symptoms of SAD are the same as those of Major Depressive Disorder. (See MDD symptoms above.) To be diagnosed with SAD, symptoms of major depression must occur for two consecutive years during the same season of the year.

Bipolar I Disorder was once called manic-depressive disorder or manic depression. This condition causes noticeable shifts in mood and energy, as well as actions and behaviors. Alterations in mood range from overly elated and elevated mood (manic episodes) to down and sad periods of depression. Bipolar I disorder is diagnosed when manic episodes occur for at least seven days or cause a need for hospitalization due to symptom severity. Depressive episodes can also occur.

Bipolar II Disorder occurs when there is a combination of depressive episodes and periods of hypomania. If any manic behavior develops, the condition will not be classified as Bipolar II.

Cyclothymic Disorder is another type of bipolar disorder. Patients with this condition experience many episodes of hypomania and depression for at least two years.

Treatments for depression can be nonmedication or medication options. Nonmedication treatments involve psychotherapy or talk therapy. Such methods teach coping skills, new ways of thinking, behaving, and interacting. This approach may change habits over time that affect mood in a negative way. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Interpersonal Therapy have shown some success in treating patients with depression.

Dealing with depression most often involves a combination of professional treatment and life style changes. Following the established treatment plan is critical to improved mental health. Those efforts can be supported by getting adequate rest, regular exercise, eating healthy meals and avoiding alcohol, tobacco and recreational drugs.