

Types of Depression by Dr. Stan Hyman

Depression refers to a deeply felt sense of sadness or despair that tends to overwhelm a person. It may have started out as a dark feeling but has progressed to an illness that affects every aspect of a person's life.

Clinical depression is different from having "the blues" in that it is all consuming and requires treatment. Depressive illness or clinical depression impacts on everything: sleeping, eating, and energy level, ability to work effectively, mood, cognitions (thoughts), judgment, and more. It can be viewed as both a psychological and physical condition.

There are several types of depression. I will describe 4 of the most well-known types. Distinctions between the different forms of depression are important to understand because they help us to choose the best possible treatment.

Major Depression

Major Depression is also known as major depressive disorder (MDD). A person who has this illness has been feeling deeply sad persistently for about 2 or more weeks. He is unable to enjoy himself even when doing things that previously gave him pleasure.

He has lost interest in most everything and seems listless and flat. When interviewed, people with MDD will likely report feeling hopeless and unable to get motivated. They often feel as if they are sinking deeper and deeper and are unable to control the descent into oblivion.

People of any age can become victims of MDD. However, it will often strike those between the ages of 25-45. In addition MDD can frequently run its course in 6-9 months. This type of depression can be a onetime event but once it strikes there is a greater possibility that it will happen again, perhaps several times in a person's life.

Dysthymia

Another form of depression is known as dysthymia. This type of depression often begins early in a person's life, frequently in childhood, and continues throughout adulthood. It is a milder form of depression and is diagnosed when someone has been feeling sad, unhappy, irritable, generally withdrawn and disinterested in life for 2 or more years.

People with this type of depression often have a hard time remembering if they have ever felt "happy". They are frequently critical of themselves and seem never

to have any fun. Since this condition is chronic the person's low mood can go unnoticed, appearing normal for him.

It is usually when the individual becomes more severely dysthymic that he seeks treatment. Sometimes his mood is so disturbing to a spouse, friend or family member, they insist he get help. Other times he may get so disgusted with a fruitless, unhappy life that he becomes self-motivated to seek it out.

Dysthymia seems to affect twice as many women as men. Depression in general has more female than male victims.

Bipolar Disorder

This type of depression is also known as manic-depressive disorder. It is characterized by significant mood swings that that interfere with a person's ability to function. Shifts in mood are often so severe that the person's entire life is affected by them.

Bipolar Disorder is different from other depressions in that the person has experienced at least one or more manic episodes. When a person is having a manic episode he can seem to go on nonstop. He needs little or no sleep, his speech may be rapid and his ideas change very quickly, he can become grandiose or belligerent and might even cause himself or others physical harm. Since these symptoms are episodic and may appear years apart, the person may go untreated for a long time.

This condition will often appear early in one's life and is likely to be chronic. Manic episodes are frequently followed by a drop into the black hole of a major depression. These cycles can occur many times causing enormous disruption and wreaking havoc on the individual and his family.

Postpartum Depression

This is a type of major depression that can strike a woman after childbirth. It is thought that the dramatic hormonal changes that take place both before and immediately after a baby is born may trigger a depression. Postpartum depression affects about 10% of new mothers, but is more common in mothers who have had some prior depression.

This depression is made more tragic because a new mother's emotional world is turned upside down and her dreams of enjoying the joys and wonders of

motherhood completely destroyed. There are many factors that can contribute to this kind of depression because of the many changes that take place in a woman's life once a baby is born,

New mothers routinely experience lack of sleep, feelings of being overwhelmed, high degrees of stress, loss of identity and feeling less attractive or desirable. A mother may resent her new child, feel irrationally angry towards it and, at the same time, feel horribly guilty for having these feelings in the first place. If these feelings persist they can weaken her defenses and create more potential for postpartum depression to occur.

About Dr. Stan Hyman

Dr. Stan Hyman has been successfully treating individuals with depression for more than 25 years. He is a professional member of the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) (www.ADAA.org) an organization dedicated improving the treatment of both anxiety and depression.

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