

Definition

When discussing depression as a symptom, a feeling of hopelessness is the most often described sensation. Depression is a common psychiatric disorder in the modern world and a growing cause of concern for health agencies worldwide due to the high social and economic costs involved. Symptoms of depression, like the disorder itself, vary in degree of severity, and contribute to mild to severe mood disturbances. Mood disturbances may range from a sudden transitory decrease in motivation and concentration to gloomy moods and irritation, or to severe, chronic prostration.

With treatment, more than 80% of people with depression respond favorably to medications, and the feeling of hopelessness subsides. With treatment, most people are able to resume their normal work and social activities.

Depression may occur at almost any stage of life, from childhood to middle or old age, as a result of a number of different factors that lead to chemical changes in the brain. Traumatic experiences, chronic stress, emotional loss, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, social isolation, biological changes, aging, and inherited predisposition are common triggers for the symptoms of depression. Depression is classified according to the symptoms displayed and patterns of occurrence. Types of depression include major depressive disorder, bipolar depressive disorder, psychotic depressive disorder, postpartum depression, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and seasonal disorder. Additional types of depression are included under the label of atypical depressive disorder. Many symptoms overlap among the types of depression, and not all people with depression experience all the symptoms associated with their particular type of the disorder.

Description

Symptoms of a depressive disorder include at least five of the following changes in the individual's previous characteristics: loss of motivation and inability to feel pleasure; deep chronic sadness or distress; changes in sleep patterns; lack of physical energy (apathy); feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness; difficulty with concentration; overeating or loss of appetite; withdrawal from interpersonal interactions or avoidance of others; death wishes, or belief in his/her own premature death. In children, the first signs of depression may be irritation and loss of concentration, apathy and distractibility during classes, and social withdrawal. Some adults initially complain of constant fatigue, even after long hours of sleep, digestive disorders, headaches, anxiety, recurrent memory lapses, and insomnia or excessive sleeping. An episode of major depression may be preceded by a period of dysthymia, a mild but persistent low mood state, usually accompanied by diminished sexual drive, decreased affective response, and loss of interest in normal social activities and hobbies.

Most individuals with depression have difficulty in dealing with the challenges of daily life, and even minor obstacles or difficulties may trigger exaggerated emotional responses. Frustrating situations are frequently met with feelings of despair, dejection, resentment, and worthlessness, with people easily desisting from their goals. People with depression may try to avoid social situations and interpersonal interactions. Some people with depression overeat, while others show a sharp loss of appetite (anorexia). In some individuals, medical treatments for some other existing illness may also cause depression as an adverse reaction. For instance, antihypertensive drugs, steroids, muscle relaxants, anticancer drugs, and opioids, as well as extensive surgery such as a coronary bypass, may lead to depression. Cancer and other degenerative diseases, chronic painful conditions, metabolic diseases or hormonal changes during adolescence, or after childbirth, menopause, or old age may be potential triggers for depression. When the first onset of depression occurs after the age of 60, there is a greater possibility that the causative factor is a cerebrovascular (blood vessels in the brain) degeneration.