



Depressive Disorders ^[1]

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Depression is a serious condition which impacts the lives of millions of children and adults around the world. Anxiety and depression have a complex relationship; understanding one is a way of comprehending the other.

Depression is more than a temporary mood or state of mind. In its chronic medical form, depression is a crippling mental illness which undermines a person's sense of motivation, purpose, and self-worth. The disorder affects over 19 million Americans every year ^[3] and can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, or social status.

Anxiety has a complicated role to play where depression is concerned. Though there is not direct evidence between anxiety causing depression or vice-versa, they both appear together quite often (a term psychologists call **co-morbidity**). Let's investigate exactly what depression is and the scope and nuances of its influence.

Definition/Exploration

Most people are familiar with the feeling of **depression**. When you feel hopeless, apathetic, unmotivated, or "down in the dumps ^[4]," you're likely reacting to some external event or circumstance which has temporarily (for less than 2 weeks) affected your mood and motivation. The majority of people cope and rebound from slight bouts of depression.

If these depressive feelings persist, however, and beginning interfering with how you live, work, and play, you are likely experiencing the onset of a clinical depressive episode. Without intervention or treatment, most depressive episodes last between 8 and 9 months. Unfortunately, around 85% of people who experience a depressive episode will experience more in the future.

Symptoms

There are many signs that a person is suffering from depression. Here is a short list ^[5] or depressive symptoms:

- Prolonged feelings of emptiness, sadness, anxiety, and/or pessimism
- Feeling helpless, hopeless, irritable, and/or restless
- Loss of pleasure or interest in things you used to enjoy (anhedonia ^[6])
- Loss of energy, motivation, and concentration
- Insomnia, bodily aches, and digestive problems
- Thoughts of or attempts at suicide

These symptoms can manifest and compound to form other sub-types of depression. Here are a few to be aware of:

1. **Major Depression** – A person experiences 5 or more of the above symptoms for a period of 2 weeks or more. These changes in thinking and mood negatively impact their lives and relationships. Major depression can be short-lived but intense. Many suicide attempts are connected to Major Depression.
2. **Persistent Depressive Disorder (PDD)** – Until recently called dysthymia, this is a less intense manifestation of depression which encompasses the same symptoms of Major Depression only extended for 2 years or more.
3. **Bipolar Disorder** – Another beast entirely, Bipolar Disorder [7] is characterized by periods of elation and mania followed by states of depression.

There are even more specific depressive subtypes, including Post-Partum Depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder, which you can learn more about by clicking [here](#) [3].

Depression & Anxiety

As you read above, many of the symptoms of depression seem to overlap with anxiety--restlessness, lack of concentration and interest, bodily aches--and anxiety is even a symptom all on its own. (For the curious, there are many more connections listed [here](#) [8].) Despite these similarities, these conditions are differentially diagnosable [9]—they are separate from one another and affect the brain and behavior in different ways.

A person suffering from depression, for instance, may come to develop symptoms or disorders of anxiety in response to their depression [10]. Likewise, someone who has long-suffered from an anxiety disorder may experience depression as a consequence of the duration and scope of their condition. One study [11] showed this relationship starkly: 85% of people who had Major Depression also had Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) [12], 35% of whom also showed signs of Panic Disorder [13].

Some studies have shown suicide rates higher than 90% for people affected by both kinds of disorders. Clinicians also agree that it takes longer to recover and cope with depression than anxiety, a factor which should be discussed with doctors, therapists, and sufferers of depression and anxiety. Follow this link [5] for some ideas on how to begin seeking treatment, and click these words to learn more about common schools of therapy.

Remember also that people who have both depression and an anxiety disorder experience the symptoms of both to a greater degree than they would individually. These two kinds of conditions feed into one another and can legitimately overwhelm, cognitively and emotionally, the people they affect. Luckily, depression and anxiety are also similarly treated. Many people take the same medications or undergo the same therapies (click [here](#) [14]) for both conditions, with similar success and retention rates.

Case Study

Below is a quote from someone reflecting on how depression affected him [5]. Do you recognize these feelings as persistent presences in your own life or in the life of someone you care about?

"It was really hard to get out of bed in the morning. I just wanted to hide under the covers and not talk to anyone. I didn't feel much like eating and I lost a lot of weight. Nothing seemed fun anymore. I was tired all the time, and I wasn't sleeping well at night. But I knew I had to keep going because I've got kids and a job. It just felt so impossible, like nothing was going to change or get better."

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Links

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- [2] <https://explorable.com/users/grharriman>
- [3] <http://www.psyweb.com/Mdisord/jsp/gendepress.jsp>
- [4] <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/depression>
- [5] <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>
- [6] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/brain-sense/200912/depression-and-anhedonia>
- [7] <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/bipolar-disorder/index.shtml>
- [8] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolution-the-self/201005/anxiety-and-depression-first-cousins-least-part-2-5>
- [9] <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolution-the-self/201005/anxiety-and-depression-first-cousins-least-part-1-5>
- [10] <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/expert-answers/depression-and-anxiety/faq-20057989>
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