

Peppy One Day, Down the Next: Signs of a Mood Disorder

By Jean Jeffers, Staff Writer

Have you ever encountered someone who is happy, excited and delighted one day, and the next day is down, sad, unable to do much and has trouble connecting with others? This individual may have a mood disorder.

Many of us have what we call a "down" day when we are blue. A person with a mood disorder may experience something more intense than what the ordinary person calls a "down" day.

Dr. Rajnish Mago, director of the Mood Disorders Program at Thomas Jefferson University and professor of psychiatry and human behavior at the Sidney Kimmel Medical College in Philadelphia, Pa., says mood disorders are a form of mental illness, not only marked by mood swings but by symptoms influencing different aspects of the personality. Mago says

the common symptoms of mood disorder include:

- prolonged sadness or crying spells;
- significant changes in appetite and sleep;
- irritability, anger, worry, agitation and anxiety;
- pessimism and indifference;
- loss of energy and persistent lethargy;
- feelings of guilt and worthlessness;
- an inability to concentrate and indecisiveness;
- an inability to enjoy life or activities once enjoyed; and
- persistent thoughts of death or suicide.

The person with a mood disorder may have difficulty holding a job or going to school. The disease may even prevent their getting out of bed.

The two main types of mood disorders, according to Mago, are major depression and bipolar disorder. Other types of mood disorder are dysthymia, a milder form of depression than major depression, and cyclothymia, characterized by milder symptoms than those seen with bipolar disorder. Schizo-affective disorder has some aspect of mood involvement mixed with schizophrenic symptoms.

Major depression is a treatable illness characterized by symptoms of sadness and loss of interest in activities. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines major depression disorder as a medical illness that affects how you feel, think and behave. This condition, the APA warns, may lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems.

Depression is different than grief. Prolonged grief may trigger depression and make it worse. Treatment for major depression is necessary and includes psychotherapy, medications (usually in the form of anti-depressants) and sometimes participation in a support group. A person with depression may have to try several meds before finding one that works effectively, and then the patient may need to try it for six to eight weeks to feel its full effect.

Bipolar disorder (previously known as manic-depressive disorder)

is another main type of mood disorder and is fairly common. This condition is marked by extreme changes in mood, thoughts, energy and behavior. The mood can alternate between manic (high, elevated) and depression (low, lethargic). This depression is not to be confused with major depression. Symptoms may be the same or similar, but treatment is different.

Treatment for bipolar disorder includes use of drugs known as mood stabilizers, such as Lithium. Sometimes anti-psychotic drugs are also used; the newer ones, Mago says, contain mood-stabilizing properties. Psychotherapy is sometimes offered, but the most important thing for the patient to do is faithfully take the drugs prescribed.

About the Author

Jean is a staff writer for *Health & Wellness Magazine* and is completing a novel due to be published in 2016.



Major depression is a treatable illness.

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