



What Are the Signs of High-Functioning Depression?

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What Is High-Functioning Depression?

High-functioning depression is a relatively new term for a condition that may be similar to other types of depression but is often not recognized or diagnosed as such for some time.

High-functioning depression usually affects high achievers: those who are successful or competent in their chosen career, those who excel in exams, the people who are always busy and often helping others out.

This type of depression allows the person to continue to work and hold down a successful career or school life, but may fall apart when they get home. To the outside world, you would never know this person has depression. They may seem to have the perfect life. They will usually have a big smile on their face, and seemingly have it all.

Symptoms of High-Functioning Depression

High-functioning depression has many of the same signs as other types of depression.

There will often be sleep issues. Someone suffering from high-functioning depression might not be able to sleep, or they may be sleeping too much, usually at the wrong time of day/night.

They may overeat, especially unhealthy food and drink, such as fatty foods, sugary snacks, and alcohol. Alternatively, they may totally lose their appetite and barely eat at all.

Sufferers may have addictive traits and focus their energy into a particular repetitive task or hobby, or become reliant on alcohol or drugs in order to relax. They may no longer enjoy previous past-times or social activities with friends and family.

The main difference is that someone with high-functioning depression will not feel depressed or extremely sad all the time. Their mood may change at a moment's notice for no apparent reason at all. They may be able to hold it together during the day, then completely fall apart when they return home. Likewise, they may be happy one day and extremely depressed the next.

They may be irritable, anxious and will become very critical of themselves as a person and as a colleague or friend. They will feel useless, that they are not doing, or not able to do a good job anymore. Also, they will think that they are no good at anything, constantly beating themselves up mentally about not being good enough.

Like other depressives, they are very good at covering up how they are feeling in public, but at home break down – this is a very important trait of high-functioning depression. They do not want to be seen as failing or needing help. And this, in conjunction with poor sleep patterns, is totally exhausting and often leads to a meltdown or loss of interest in their usual hobbies at home.

High-functioning depressives will often show care and concern to others, giving advice and practical help yet unable to recognize their own illness or help themselves to take the steps needed to get better.

Treatment for High-Functioning Depression

As with other mental illnesses treatment for high-functioning depression will usually be in the form of drug and/or talk therapy.

The patient may be offered anti-anxiety medications, antidepressants, or advised to try a herbal medication such as St. John's Wort.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is often offered as this works by changing unwanted thoughts and behaviors. The therapist will be able to identify what the problems are and teach the patient new coping strategies.

More formal types of therapy may be needed in severe or deep-rooted problems.

Tips for Living with High-Functioning Depression

Living with any form of mental illness is hard, but the more you learn about your illness, the easier it will be to cope with it. By beginning to understand that it is high-functioning depression making you feel the way you do, you will be able to deal with it better. It is not you being a failure, or unable to cope, it is an illness that you will recover from.

By recognizing your own symptoms and trigger warnings, you will be able to put in self-help practices to alleviate the symptoms.

As with any mental illness, it is important to adopt some forms of self-care.

- Exercise is hugely important as it improves oxygen flow to the brain and releases "feel good" hormones. It doesn't have to be high impact or extremely energetic if you don't feel up to it.
- Some gentle stretching exercise such as yoga or pilates is excellent for good mental health as they will also concentrate on regulating your breathing. Tai chi and qi gong equally so.
- Going for a walk is a form of gentle exercise that will also get you out into the fresh air. It can be as strenuous or relaxing as you want it to be.
- Tell people that you are suffering from high-functioning depression. It is not weak to admit that you are not feeling well or need help. You will often be surprised at how many other people may open up to you that they are struggling too. Knowing that someone else is experiencing the same or similar to you can be a huge support because they understand the irrational feelings too.
- If you feel unable to socialize in your usual places, invite people to your home for an informal afternoon tea or morning coffee, even if it's just for half an hour. Social interaction outside the workplace is important, even if you feel full of dread beforehand.
- Reading or watching films can be good, especially if you find something that piques your interest. It will take your mind off of being self-critical for that time.
- Long bubble baths and massages can help. In fact, anything that you find relaxing.
- Sometimes, it may be a simple case of adopting a slower paced lifestyle or career change in conjunction after some CBT.