



Depression

Depression is a mood disorder i.e. a disturbance in a person's emotional state.

Major depressive episode.

It can occur overnight as a reaction to a psychological trauma and is diagnosed when five or more symptoms have been present for a two week period. Characteristics of major depressive episode include the following:

1. *Depressed mood*: All sufferers report a degree of unhappiness and may cry often although severely depressed individuals may feel the need to cry but will not be able to. People with depressed mood feel both hopeless and helpless
2. *Loss of pleasure or interest in usual activities*. This is known as anhedonia and the person is unable to enjoy activities that they typically got enjoyment from.
3. *Disturbance of appetite*. The majority of depressed individuals lose their appetite and lose weight yet a minority tend to eat more and gain weight.
4. *Sleep disturbance*. These include insomnia where a person is unable to sleep for long periods of time, waking up early and not being able to sleep again, not being able to get to sleep at all and awakening several times at night. Depressed people may also sleep excessively.
5. *Psychomotor retardation or agitation*. In psychomotor retardation the person moves slowly, seems overwhelmed and tired and has difficulty in speaking. Infrequently, persons may experience psychomotor agitation characterised by continuous movement such as moving about a lot.
6. *Loss of energy*. There is sharp decrease in energy levels of the sufferer who may feel exhausted without having done anything.
7. *Feelings of worthlessness and guilt*. Depressed individuals often feel that they are incapable and useless and these feelings are often experienced together with guilt. If there is a problem, the person often attributes blame within themselves.
8. *Difficulties in thinking*. Mental processes are slowed down and individuals are often indecisive and find it difficult to think, concentrate and remember things.
9. *Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide*. People experiencing major depressive episode often feel that they and other people would be better off dead.

Major depressive disorder: When a person experiences one or more major depressive episodes they are said to be suffering from major depressive disorder. Up to 4% of men and 6% of women are said to have major depressive disorder at any given month.

Famous people with Depression

- Boris Yeltsin (Russian president)
- J.K. Rowling (author of Harry Potter series)
- Jim Carrey (actor and comedian)
- Vincent Van Gogh (painter)
- Winston Churchill (British prime minister)

Treatment: A combination of psychosocial interventions and medication are used to help individuals become in control of their conditions.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT): modifies problematic thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

Psychodynamic therapy: seeks to discover and deal with early traumas that are believed to have caused depression.

Medication: Various types of antidepressants are often prescribed. Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) where seizures are electrically induced in people with depression is also used and can have remarkable outcome. It is used as a last resort.

Professional help: It is important to seek help from qualified psychiatrists who can prescribe medication and qualified therapists who are specifically trained to use techniques that help the person deal with his/her symptoms and feelings.