

Terminology

When educating on or discussing mental health issues, it is important to use correct terminology. This section will help you gain some basic understanding of the differences between different mental health disorders.

Depression, Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia

Major Depression - Major depression is a serious common medical condition that involves the mind and body. Many people don't realize that there are emotional and physical symptoms of depression. Depression significantly affects a person's appetite, sleep, energy, thinking, self-esteem and physical well-being. The symptoms are persistent and not the same as a temporary blue mood or normal emotional experiences such as sadness or grief. Depression can have severe consequences in terms of suffering and disability.

The symptoms of depression include:

- Persistently sad, anxious, irritable, empty mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Significant appetite and/or weight changes
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Feeling tired, rundown, loss of energy
- Feeling restless, agitated or physical slowing
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, hopelessness, helplessness, emptiness
- Persistent physical symptoms such as a headaches, digestive problems, chronic pain that do not respond to routine treatment
- Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts¹

Dysthymia - A less severe type of depression, dysthymia (or dysthymic disorder), involves long-lasting symptoms that do not seriously disable, but keep one from functioning well or feeling good. Many people with dysthymia also experience major depressive episodes during their lives.²

Bipolar Disorder - Bipolar disorder differs significantly from clinical depression, although the symptoms for the depressive phase of the illness are similar. People who have bipolar disorder talk about experiencing mood shifts. These swings can be severe, ranging from extreme energy to deep despair. These mood shifts disrupt normal life activities distinguish bipolar mood episodes from ordinary mood changes. The shifts may be mild ranging from sadness to irritability or restlessness.

Symptoms of mania (high) of bipolar disorder

- Increased physical and mental activity and energy

- Heightened mood, exaggerated optimism and self-confidence
- Excessive irritability, aggressive behavior
- Decreased need for sleep without experiencing fatigue
- Grandiose delusions, inflated sense of self-importance
- Racing speech, racing thoughts, flight of ideas
- Impulsiveness, poor judgment, distractibility
- Reckless behavior
- In the most severe cases, delusions and hallucinations

Symptoms of depression (lows) of bipolar disorder

- Prolonged sadness or unexplained crying spells
- Significant changes in appetite and sleep patterns
- Irritability, anger, worry, agitation, anxiety
- Pessimism, indifference
- Loss of energy, persistent lethargy
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness
- Inability to concentrate, indecisiveness
- Inability to take pleasure in former interests, social withdrawal
- Unexplained aches and pains
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide³

Schizophrenia - Schizophrenia, which affects about 1% of the world's population, is a severe, chronic, and generally disabling brain disease. While the term schizophrenia literally means "split mind", it should not be confused with a "split", or multiple, personality. It is more accurately described as a psychosis—a type of illness that causes severe mental disturbances that disrupt normal thoughts, speech, and behavior. Schizophrenia is believed to be due to a combination of genetic and environmental factors.

The symptoms of schizophrenia fall into three categories:

Positive symptoms, which are unusual thoughts or perceptions that include hallucinations (disturbances of sensory perception), delusions (false beliefs) and thought disorder.

Negative symptoms, which represent a loss or a decrease in the ability to initiate plans, speak, express emotion, or find pleasure in everyday life. These symptoms are harder to recognize as part of the disorder and can be mistaken for laziness or depression.

Cognitive symptoms (or cognitive deficits), which are problems with attention, certain types of memory, and the executive functions that allow us to plan and organize. Cognitive deficits can also be difficult to recognize as part of the disorder but are the most disabling in terms of leading a normal life.⁴



Anxiety Disorders

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) – GAD is characterized by excessive, unrealistic worry that lasts six months or more. Symptoms include:

- Trembling
- Muscular aches
- Insomnia
- Abdominal upsets
- Dizziness
- Irritability⁵

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) - In OCD, individuals are plagued by persistent, recurring thoughts (obsessions) that reflect exaggerated anxiety or fears; typical obsessions include worry about being contaminated or fears of behaving improperly or acting violently. The obsessions may lead an individual to perform a ritual or routine (compulsions) - such as washing hands, repeating phrases or hoarding - to relieve the anxiety caused by the obsession.⁵

Panic Disorder – People with panic disorder suffer severe attacks of panic—which may make them feel like they are having a heart attack. Symptoms include:

- Heart palpitations
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Sweating
- Tingling sensation
- Feeling of choking
- Fear of dying⁵

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – PTSD can follow an exposure to a traumatic event such as a sexual or physical assault, witnessing a death, the unexpected death of a loved one, or natural disaster. There are three main symptoms associated with PTSD:

- Reliving the traumatic event (such as flashbacks and nightmares)
- Avoidance behaviors (such as avoiding places related to the trauma)
- Emotional numbing (detachment from others) and physiological arousal (difficulty sleeping, irritability or poor concentration).⁵

Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia) – Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is characterized by extreme anxiety about being judged by others or behaving in a way that might cause embarrassment or ridicule. This intense anxiety may lead to avoidance behavior. Physical symptoms associated with this disorder include heart palpitations, faintness, blushing and profuse sweating.⁵

Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa – Anorexia Nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by the refusal to maintain a normal body weight. Although Anorexia is typically characterized by dieting and fasting, some individuals engage in bingeing, purging, or both.

Symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa include:

- The perception of body shape and weight is inaccurate
- Inability to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for age and height
- Intense fear of weight gain or becoming fat, even though underweight
- Denial of the seriousness of the current low body weight
- In females who have started their menstrual cycle, the absence of at least three consecutive menstrual cycles⁶

Bulimia Nervosa – Bulimia Nervosa is a serious, potentially life-threatening eating disorder characterized by repeated episodes of binge eating followed by behaviors such as self-induced vomiting, use of laxatives, or excessive exercise.

The symptoms of Bulimia Nervosa include:

- The perception of body shape and weight is inaccurate
- Recurrent episodes of binge eating. A binge is defined as eating in a short period of time an amount of food that is definitely larger than most individuals would eat under similar circumstances
- Recurrent behavior in order to prevent weight gain, such as self-induced vomiting; misuse of laxatives, diuretics, enemas, or other medications; fasting; or excessive exercise
- Self-evaluation is excessively influenced by body shape and weight⁶

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