

Long-Term Depressive Disorders

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Many people have bouts of depression they have to deal with once in a while, but when the condition begins to affect your daily life and you can't seem to pull yourself out of it, you may have a long-term depressive disorder and need help getting a diagnosis and treatment.

It's important that you know which type you have so you can seek help - whether it be in the form of medications, lifestyle changes or speaking to a therapist. Sometimes, there are events in your life causing the problem and other times it's due to hormonal changes.

There are two different types of long-term depressive disorders – major and persistent. If you're depressed for two years or longer, you could be suffering from persistent depressive disorder.

Persistent depressive disorder can consist of dysthymia – low-grade depression and chronic (major) depression. Major depression consists of feeling depressed most of the time and may be due to chemical changes in your body.

It's important to be able to recognize symptoms and choose the best method of treatment for your type of depression. A doctor can certainly help you pinpoint it, but it's good to have awareness of it yourself, too.

Causes of Long-Term Depression Disorders

Certain events in your life can bring on long-term depression, but so can chemical changes in your brain. It's important to know the causes of the various types of long-term depression so you can choose the proper treatment.

Persistent (dysthymia) depression occurs at various times during the year, such as before and during a woman's menstrual cycle. You're not depressed all the time, but during those days and weeks you're definitely

suffering from low moods and likely experience other symptoms of depression.

SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a type of long-term depression caused mostly by lack of sunlight and occurs during certain times of the year (mostly winter months). It will typically go away during spring and summer when the sun is brightest.

Although the exact cause of long-term depressive disorders isn't known, scientists have examined such factors as biological differences, brain chemistry, inherited traits and life events.

Biological differences mean that there are actual physical alterations in the brain that trigger depression. How significant these changes are isn't yet known, but they may help to find the exact cause in the future.

Brain chemicals play a role in long-term depressive disorders when neurotransmitters don't function properly. If neurotransmitters don't interact with neurocircuits in the brain mood stability may be altered, causing depression.

Inherited traits for depression could come from your blood relatives who have suffered from the condition in the past. Genealogy research will eventually help to find the genes causing the depression.

Traumatic life events such as a death in the family often triggers persistent depressive disorder, but as time goes by the depression usually lessens – especially if the person takes lifestyle steps needed or takes medication to pull him or her out of it.

Personality traits such as low self-esteem, having a co-dependent or dependent relationship, having a history of personality disorders, negativity, being critical with yourself or living life with pessimism can add to the possible causes of long-term depression.

Causes of long-term depression may also be linked with other issues in your life such as anxiety or mood disorders, relationship or family conflicts, substance abuse, work or school difficulties that cause low productivity.

Change in quality of life, medical or chronic pain issues, thoughts of suicide or mental health and personality disorders may also trigger bouts of depression that may be difficult to overcome.

Recognizing the Symptoms of Long-Term Depressive Disorders

It's important to recognize the symptoms of long-term depressive disorders – either persistent or major – to seek the proper treatment. These symptoms may begin in early childhood, the teen years or in young adults and become chronic as time goes by.

Persistent depressive disorders may be intense or mild over the years, but the intensity can change as the disorder continues. Most of the time, symptoms of long-term depressive disorders only go away for a couple of months at a time, but they might also trigger bouts with major depression (termed double depression).

These symptoms may include profound sadness or loss of interest in daily activities, feelings of hopelessness and emptiness, feeling incapable of completing the least of tasks, extreme fatigue and total lack of energy.

People with long-term depressive disorders may also become excessively angry or irritable and may have trouble making decisions or concentrating. He or she may also have problems at work due to productivity issues and effectiveness.

Depressed people often avoid others and have feelings of guilt or worries. They may also begin to overeat or have no appetite at all. Children may experience depression by expressing mood swings and irritability.

Psychotic depression is a form of major depression, which may include symptoms of hallucinations, belief that others are trying to inflict harm (paranoia) or false beliefs (delusional).

PMDD (Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder) is a persistent long-term depressive disorder that may be experienced at the start of or during a woman's menstrual cycle. Symptoms may include anxiety, fatigue,

insomnia or sleeping too much, lack of mental acuity, mood swings, irritability, change in appetite and feelings of being overwhelmed.

Atypical depression is a persistent long-term depressive disorder which is characterized by a depressive mood that can be lifted by a positive happening in the person's life. But, the positive mood is only temporary and can be a harbinger of other depressive disorders.

With Atypical depression, the person may experience an overall heaviness in the legs and arms, sleep more than normal, increase in appetite and sensitivity to criticism. Postpartum depression (Peripartum) may occur in women who have given childbirth during the weeks or months afterward and could be characterized by anxiety and other symptoms of depression.

Situational depression may be diagnosed by your doctor as a stress response syndrome because it often occurs during a particularly stressful event in your life such as a divorce, job loss or death in the family.

You would likely experience the same symptoms as in other types of long-term depression. A person diagnosed with the long-term depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, often experiences symptoms such as mood swings ranging from extreme highs to extreme lows.

The lowest phase of the disorder expresses the same symptoms as major depression. A mental healthcare provider can guide you through the maze of symptoms of a long-term depressive disorder and help you choose the right treatment.

Diagnosis and Treatments for Long-Term Depressive Disorders

It's best to seek help from a mental health specialist to diagnose and treat long-term depressive disorders. The doctor will likely run tests to ensure that the symptoms of depression aren't caused by a physical condition such as hypothyroidism.

If you've been suffering from depression for more than two weeks, your doctor will ask for a full medical evaluation. Emphasis will be placed on your family and personal psychiatric past.

There are several ways to treat long-term depression symptoms – medications and/or psychotherapy. You may benefit from trying both forms of treatment at the same time. Severe depression may require a hospital stay, especially if you have suicidal thoughts.

Long-term depression treatment options include medications such as SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) which are known to be safer than some other types of antidepressants.

Some medications used to treat atypical depression include bupropion, mirtazapine, trazodone, nefazodone and vortioxetine. SNRIs (Serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors such as duloxetine (Cymbalta) are also used to treat long-term depression.

Tricyclic drugs such as tricyclic antidepressants may be used, but you may experience more severe side effects. These drugs may be prescribed if treatment with SNRIs hasn't been effective.

Monoamine oxidase inhibitors may cause even more serious side effects and require that you adhere to a strict diet because of the chance of the drug having an adverse side effect to certain foods such as cheese and wine.

Your doctor may also suggest that you take two antidepressants that complement each other such as adding a mood stabilizer or anti-anxiety of stimulant medication. If none of these medications seem to reduce your symptoms of depression, the doctor may recommend brain stimulation therapy.

Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) is one form of treatment in which electric currents are sent through the brain to help the neurotransmitters function properly. Transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) works by placing a treatment coil against the scalp and sending magnetic pulses that help to regulate mood and depression.

Keep in mind that there are no physical tests such as blood, X-rays, MRIs or other forms of testing that can be used to diagnose long-term depressive disorders. If you find yourself depressed most of the time, try to take notes on your feelings so you can relay them to your doctor.

Tips for Managing Long-Term Depressive Disorders

The first step in managing long-term depressive disorders is seeking the correct diagnosis and treatment plan. Then, you can discuss lifestyle options with your doctor. Such changes in lifestyle habits as healthy diet, regular exercise, avoiding alcohol and stopping smoking are all great first steps in managing depression.

You'll also need friends and family members to support you in your quest to be free of these debilitating symptoms. Developing positive habits and thoughts are important in improving your feelings of well-being.

Even if you're taking medications or other forms of treatment for depression, you might also benefit from discussing your condition with a therapist. Psychotherapy lets you speak to a professional to identify the negatives in your life and how to replace them with positive thoughts and actions.

The mind/body connection is crucial when dealing with any type of depression – especially long-term depressive disorders. Acupuncture, yoga, meditation, aerobic exercise, massage therapy guided imagery and any type of activity that engages the mind and the body together is helpful, but not always enough to treat depression without medication to go along with it.

Never stop taking an anti-depressant medication without talking to your healthcare provider. Although they're not addictive, a physical reaction can happen when you miss several doses.

You may experience withdrawal and an abrupt worsening of depression symptoms. If you want to stop taking the medication, talk to your doctor about a slow and safe method to decrease or halt the dosage.

Best Natural Remedies for Long-Term Depressive Disorders

Natural remedies for depression can sometimes help reduce the intensity of the symptoms. Keep in mind that such treatments for depression aren't usually enough to alleviate most types of depressive disorders – especially long-term depression.

Supplements such as St. John's wort may act to relieve depression symptoms if you have mild forms of depression, but be aware that it may interact negatively with other medications you may be taking.

Omega-3 fatty acids found in such foods as walnuts, fish, flax oil and flax seed are usually considered safe, but in high doses this supplement may also interact negatively with other medications.

SAME is not approved by the FDA to treat depression but this synthetic form of a natural chemical produced by the body has been proven healthy to treat certain types of depression. More research is being done on SAME because it's also been found to have negative reactions to some people diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

Yoga and meditation relax the body and mind and are good natural remedies for lessening the symptoms of long-term depressive disorders. Adhering to a healthy diet and regular exercise is also helpful.

Chamomile and green teas are relaxing and can help boost your mood and feelings of well-being. But, avoid coffee and alcohol. Although you'll get a quick rush from caffeine, feelings will quickly crash and burn.

If you're diagnosed with a long-term depressive disorder, don't despair. There is plenty of help, both from medications and lifestyle changes that can help you get through the dark days and get back to your life without the horrible symptoms of depression.



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