

Is Depression Keeping You Off-Balance?

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You're stuck. You can't see what's holding you back, and to top it off, you're feeling guilty about it.

In my practice, I often see clients who aren't motivated and then feel guilty because they aren't going anywhere. No sign of movement but all the signs of a guilt that overwhelms any ambition to change and reinforces the conviction it is too late to do anything. The client is stuck in a world of little or no energy, only worry and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. It's a shock when I ask them whether they might be depressed. They may say, "How can I be depressed? I don't cry all the time. I get myself to work. It's my fault I feel like this. If only I would...."

What a depressed mood looks like is often just a misperception. Being depressed is not a black and white thing. Being depressed often involves shades of gray. A depressed mood does not have to mean you're crying all the time or you can't get out of bed. The truth is, neither of these symptoms are required for a diagnosis.

There are other things besides feeling sad, tearful, or blue that could describe depression: feeling numb, worn out, exhausted for no apparent reason, or emotionally cut off from the rest of the world. Maybe you're just irritable. Maybe you've become angry, or maybe you overreact to seemingly minor issues. Maybe you feel if only you had more energy, you could make the changes you so desperately need to make.

The symptoms can be even more subtle. It could be the loss of interest or satisfaction in normal daily activities. You're just not motivated. When this lack of interest involves pleasurable activities such as hobbies, socializing, or sexual activity, it's easy to overlook it as just a symptom of hectic modern living — too much to do, too much stress — rather than depression. After all, these things that formerly interested you are, well, *optional*. Only when this lack of interest involves activities necessary to function such as getting out of bed, taking a shower, cleaning your house, does it become apparent to you and others that there is a problem.

There are, of course, other symptoms described or identified in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-R)* to diagnose depression. While you must be experiencing one of these two symptoms, either 1) your mood is depressed or 2) you have less interest in or get less satisfaction from your daily life activities, the following is a list of the remaining symptoms of depression.

To be considered depressed, you must experience at least four of these symptoms:

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- 1) Significant weight loss or gain in the past month. You may also experience an increase or decrease in your appetite.
- 2) Difficulty sleeping or are sleeping too much almost every day.
- 3) Feeling physically slower or faster than usual.
- 4) Tired or have less energy than you normally do almost every day.
- 5) Feel worthless or are overwhelmed by feelings of guilt daily or almost every day, guiltier than is appropriate for a given situation.
- 6) Difficulty focusing, concentrating and/or making decisions – even small decisions like what to have for dinner.
- 7) Thinking about death – either the fear of death or wondering if dying would finally give you the rest you are looking for. *If you are experiencing any of these signs it is important you talk to a professional immediately.*

Depression is the only health condition I know that constantly tells those suffering from it they do not deserve help. If you find you are experiencing more than one of the symptoms listed above and have tried to make changes in your life without success, do not believe the mental message that it is all your fault. It is not.

There are many ways to get depression under control and your life back in balance. You can certainly talk to a counselor. You could even take medication. People often resist it, but medication will treat the chemical imbalance that affects your motivation. It is no different than taking medication for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or diabetes.

Because this chemical imbalance affects your motivation, it doesn't mean you're lazy. If you have done everything you can to feel better but it just isn't working, now is the time to consult a professional.

Now is the time to get your ambition back, to get your life back in balance.

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