



Appetite, energy level, sleep can be depression signs

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During difficult times in our lives we all have experienced feeling down, hopelessness or the blues. But is that depression? If we ask random people this question we may get many different answers. Those in the mental health field have a set of criteria to determine if this is depression or just life.

Sleep

We all have sleep disturbances at times in our life. However, depression is associated with changes in sleep patterns.

Individuals who are used to receiving a full eight hours of evening rest may begin experiencing symptoms of depression that include: difficulty falling or staying asleep, decreases in quality of sleep, and getting rest but still not feeling completely rested in the morning.

Some depressed individuals can have the opposite reaction. They begin to sleep more than usual, often 10-12 hours a day.

Appetite

Do you eat more or less than usual? Have you experienced weight gain or loss without trying? And, do you find yourself eating things you would not normally eat?

I was told by a friend who was taking care of her 90-year-old terminally ill mother that she craved high-fat foods such as dip and chips (something she never ordinarily ate).

These are all questions that help to determine mood when trying to determine whether or not one is experiencing depression.

Activities

Do you engage in activities you once enjoyed?

When was the last time you danced, rode a bike, played with children or grandchildren, visited with friends or family, laughed or engaged in your hobbies? If you can't remember or have to get your Palm Pilot out to see the last time you scheduled something fun, it's been too long. But does this mean you're depressed?

Irritability

Many people report they are on edge more than usual, feel angry for little or no reason, and things that would not have been a big deal before are now the very thing that gets on their last nerve.

Energy level

Many people report a general feeling of being run down. They report that things that were once relaxing or energizing now require too much energy.

For married people the question that helps pinpoint this is, "How is your sex life?" If one has to think about it or asks "what's that" then we have a pretty good idea that the energy level is low.

Duration

And finally, how long have you felt like this?

We all have had periods of time in which we have experienced all of the above. But does this mean it's depression? Not necessarily. Duration of symptoms is an important key to determining depression. Situations such as divorce, death of a

loved one, dealing with an ailing parent, partner or child, and loss of a job can cause one to be lethargic or irritable, to lose sleep or to deter his appetite.

Some of these symptoms may abate on their own in four to six weeks to a couple of months. However, if these symptoms continue for several months or become worse, then one should consult a professional, who can then make a diagnosis and recommend a course of treatment, which may include therapy and/or medication.

With proper treatment one can overcome these symptoms and return to a higher level of functioning.

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