7 Signs of High-Functioning Depression

by JO JACKSON

High-Functioning Depression

High-functioning depression is a relatively new term for a condition that may be similar to other types of depression but is often not recognized or diagnosed as such for some time.

High-functioning depression usually affects high achievers: those who are successful or competent in their chosen career, those who excel in exams and people who are always busy and often help others.

This type of depression allows a person to continue to work and hold down a successful career or school life, but may fall apart when they get home. To the outside world, you would never know this person has depression. They may seem to have the perfect life. They will usually have a big smile on their face, and seemingly have it all.

Symptoms of High-Functioning Depression

High-functioning depression has many of the same signs as other types of depression.

1. Sleep Issues

There will often be sleep issues. Someone suffering from high-functioning depression might not be able to sleep, or they may be sleeping too much, usually at the wrong time of day or night.

2. Overeating

They may overeat, especially unhealthy food and drinks, such as fatty foods, sugary snacks and alcohol. Alternatively, they may totally lose their appetite and barely eat at all.

3. Addiction Development

Sufferers may have addictive traits and focus their energy in a particular repetitive task or hobby. They may become reliant on alcohol or drugs in order to relax. They may no longer enjoy previous pass times or social activities with friends and family.

4. Inconsistent Feelings of Sadness

The main difference is that someone with high-functioning depression will not feel depressed or extremely sad all the time. Their mood may change at a moment's notice for no apparent reason at all. They may be able to hold it together during the day, then completely fall apart when they return home. Likewise, they may be happy one day and extremely depressed the next.

5. Irritability and Anxiety

They may be irritable, anxious and will become very critical of themselves as a person and as a colleague or friend. They will feel useless, that they are not doing or not able to do a good job anymore. Also, they will think that they are no good at anything, constantly beating themselves up mentally about not being good enough.

6. Put-Together in Public But Not at Home

Like other people with depression, they are very good at covering up how they are feeling in public, but at home break down. This is a very important trait of high-functioning depression. They do not want to be seen as failing or needing help. This, in conjunction with poor sleep patterns, is totally exhausting and often leads to a meltdown or loss of interest in their usual hobbies at home.

7. Shows Care and Concern for Others But Not Themselves

High-functioning depressives will often show care and concern to others, giving advice and practical help, yet they are unable to recognize their own illness or help themselves to take the steps needed to get better.

Treatment for High-Functioning Depression

As with other mental illnesses treatment for high-functioning depression will usually be in the form of drug and/or talk therapy.

The patient may be offered anti-anxiety medications, antidepressants or advised to try a herbal medication, such as St. John's Wort.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is often offered as this works by changing unwanted thoughts and behaviors. The therapist will be able to identify what the problems are and teach the patient new coping strategies.

More formal types of therapy may be needed in severe or deep-rooted problems.

Tips for Living With High-Functioning Depression

Living with any form of mental illness is hard, but the more you learn about your illness, the easier it will be to cope with it. By beginning to understand that it is high-functioning depression making you feel the way you do, you will be able to deal with it better. It is not you being a failure or unable to cope, it is an illness that you will recover from.

By recognizing your own symptoms and trigger warnings, you will be able to put in self-help practices to alleviate the symptoms.

As with any mental illness, it is important to adopt some forms of self-care.

- Exercise is hugely important as it improves oxygen flow to the brain and releases feel good hormones. It doesn't have to be high impact or extremely energetic if you don't feel up to it.
- Some gentle stretching exercise such as yoga or Pilates is excellent for good mental health as they will also concentrate on regulating your breathing. Tai chi and qi gong can do this too.
- Going for a walk is a form of gentle exercise that will get you out into the fresh air. It can be as strenuous or relaxing as you want it to be.
- Tell people that you are suffering from high-functioning depression. It is not weak to admit that you are not feeling well or need help. You will often be surprised at how many other people may open up to you that they are struggling too. Knowing that someone else is experiencing the same thing or something similar to you can be a huge support because they understand the irrational feelings too.
- If you feel unable to socialize in your usual places, invite people to your home for an informal afternoon tea or morning coffee, even if it is just for half an hour. Social interaction outside the workplace is important, even if you feel full of dread beforehand.

- Reading or watching films can be good, especially if you find something that piques your interest. It will take your mind off of being self-critical for that time.
- Long bubble baths and massages can help. In fact, anything you find relaxing can help.
- Sometimes, it may be a simple case of adopting a slower paced lifestyle or career change in conjunction after some CBT.