What’s It Like to Live With Low Grade Depression?

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Understanding Low Grade Depression

Depression symptoms exist on a spectrum and range from the severe and serious to minor and manageable. When depression is intense, the person can experience suicidal thoughts, extreme guilt, and motivation so low that they can hardly muster the energy to get out of bed. With low grade depression, it can impact the person’s health and well-being without being so evident to others.

This low grade depression may not be as significant and threatening as other levels of the condition, but it still has the power to create harm. With proper education and information, a person with low grade depression can learn to understand and cope with their diagnosis in healthy and sustainable ways.

Understanding the Spectrum of Depression

People should always remember that depression is not just one condition. Instead, it is a group of mental health disorders that share similarities that include issues with mood, energy and self-worth.

The signature depression diagnosis is called major depressive disorder, which is marked by nine possible symptoms:

- Low mood or irritability
- Low energy and feeling fatigued
- Limited interest in activities that used to be pleasurable
- Changes in sleep
- Changes in diet and weight
- Feeling sped up or slowed down
- Decreased ability to concentrate, think clearly and make good decisions
- Excessive feelings of worthless and guilt
- Frequent thoughts about death, dying and suicide

A person with a severe major depressive disorder could have each of these symptoms and really suffer from the condition. They could be unable to work, go to school, maintain their home and engage in healthy and meaningful relationships. They may be a danger to themselves or others and require periods of inpatient hospitalizations to maintain safety.

People with low grade depression will commonly have a much different experience. Without enduring all nine symptoms to a high level, they may only have five symptoms of depression that tend to be mild and more inconsistent.

Rather than being unable to function at all in home, work and school, they must manage minor complications and setbacks. Rather than needing the restrictions of emergency psychiatric care, they will need ongoing outpatient

medication and therapy services.

Is Low Grade Depression Better Than Other Types of Depression?

Low grade depression, sometimes called high functioning depression, certainly has its advantages compared to other depressive disorders. The benefits of low grade depression compared to intense depressive disorders:

- Fewer depressive symptoms
- Less intense depressive symptoms
- A less negative influence on multiple aspects of life
- More helpful treatment options

Despite these benefits, low grade depression creates risks that are not usually present with more severe depressive conditions. Some risks of low grade depression:

- Being more likely to be labeled as lazy, moody, or over dramatic
- Struggling to identify, acknowledge, or understand that their symptoms are caused by depression
- Receiving the appropriate level of care and recognition from others

Others may reject the presence of depression in an individual's life, minimize its effects and respond in ways that actually increase symptoms. Because low grade depression does not fit the stereotypical view of the disorder, people will refuse to help.

Depression, at any level, is an undesirable, harmful and negative weight. No one should have to tolerate the condition.

Finding Treatment for Low Grade Depression

When depressive symptoms are starting to have a negative impact on any facet of life, seeking a mental health evaluation will be essential. Fortunately, primary care doctors (PCPs), therapists and other professionals are readily available at doctors' offices, schools, workplaces and community agencies to assess and treat all levels of depression.

Many people will start with a period of psychotherapy to treat their low grade depression. Therapy usually involves the person with depression meeting with a therapist in an individual, group, or family setting to treat symptoms of depression.

Therapy can help treat depression by:

- Understanding the roots of their depression
- Improving communication skills
- Changing thinking patterns to be more positive and optimistic
- Shifting behaviors towards being more productive
- Identifying triggers leading to depression and ways to modify that experience
- Encouraging healthier physical health habits related to exercise, sleep and diet

Some people may only need a few therapy sessions to manage their low grade depression, while others' depression may be more persistent and require more sessions.

Medication management is another great option for depression treatment, with or without therapy services. There are many types of antidepressant medications used to reduce symptoms, but not every medication is right for every person.

Prescribers, like PCPs, psychiatrists and nurse practitioners, may employ a trial and error approach to medication by starting a medicine, studying the effects and switching drugs when needed. Medications may take a month or

more to produce results, so patience and persistence are necessary.

Final Notes

Low grade depression is not as intense and life-threatening as other forms of depression, but it is not pleasant or desirable in any way. People with low grade depression should be aware of the unique challenges inherent in the condition to avoid negative consequences.