

# Depression: The Black Cloud Disorder

by admin on January 19, 2010

By: Susan Jacob, Ph.D.



*“I want to know why my wife, Janice is so negative? She has a black cloud with her where ever she goes it feels like she has an anchor connecting her to this bleak cloud. She does not want to do anything with me. She complains she hates her job, but doesn’t do anything about it. Janice is always tired. She is in bed a lot but claims she doesn’t sleep. Maybe she’s unhappy with me? It’s been so long since we had sex, I forgot what it’s like. We don’t do anything anymore; Janice doesn’t do anything anymore. Janice loved to garden, but the garden is dead. Some days I have my wife back and she snaps out of it, but for the most part, she’s a different woman. Janice tells me I do not love her. She always thinks I am looking for someone else. I am not. I do not care about the weight she gained. I want us to be like we were. She tells me she doesn’t know what she wants. She is hiding, crying, or angry and whatever I do makes her so unhappy. I try; I try so hard. Nothing I do is right.”*

Janice’s heavy black cloud has a name—dysthymia. Dysthymia is a mood disorder, like depression, but is different in that the symptoms can come and go and an irritable mood, sleep disorders, fatigue, and poor self-esteem are often associated.

## What are the symptoms of dysthymia?

To have a diagnosis of dysthymia, a person is chronically depressed mood most of the time for at least two years in adults and one year in children.

The condition affects two or more of the following:

- Appetite
- Sleep
- Energy
- Self-esteem
- Decision making
- Concentration
- Feelings of hopelessness

## Frequently asked questions about dysthymia

## **What is dysthymia disorder and how do I tell if someone has dysthymia?**

Dysthymia disorder is a form of depression. You have reason for concern if someone you care about has two or more of the above symptoms that are present most of the time for two or more years. The diagnosis can be made by a therapist or a medical doctor.



## **Why can't she snap out of it?**

Dysthymia is a health condition that affects about 6% of the population. It is a form of depression; it is chronic and negatively affects the ability to function. Though there are many things you can do to work on getting better, it is hard work and does not happen overnight. Dysthymic Disorder is very treatable. With hard work it is very hopeful.

## **Isn't everyone depressed sometimes?**

We all have times that we feel pretty bad. It is normal to feel sad and disappointed in certain situations. Depression is more intense and dysthymia is chronic. To be diagnosed with dysthymia, Janice would have to have felt this bad more days than most for two or more years.

## **What if it just how you have always been?**

No one should feel this bad. If you have always felt this bad, it is time to get help. Dysthymia can begin in childhood. Children and teens with Dysthymia can be cranky or irritable as well as depressed. They are overly hard on themselves and find it hard to be positive about anything. Do you recognize that you have a stronger reaction to negative events than most people? Do you wish you could let hurt feelings go? Do you find you cannot help how bad you feel? It is not a choice. Knowing that you cannot feel less bad can make you harder on yourself. It is worth it to see a therapist and find out how to get better

## **What about grief and loss?**

It is true that part of the stages of grief is depression. If this stage of grief goes on more than three months it may be a more serious condition.

### **Can someone cause depression in a loved one by not making them happy?**

Relationships can lead to unhappiness, but dysthymia is a medical condition. We can't give it. This is not contagious. Others can be affected by the weight of the sadness.

### **Is saying you are depressed just something people say to get “happy pills?”**

Sometimes people with depression are prescribed an antidepressant by their medical doctor as part of the treatment. They are not “uppers” there is no “high.” The most they can do is make the patient feel more normal.

Antidepressants do not make you stop feeling. They help you feel less upset. If they are working right, they help you to let problems and hurt feelings go. The same things will upset you but you won't need to cry for hours thinking terrible things. You may have a few “choice words” to say. You may want to stomp around and complain for a few minutes. You will see that all negative things that happen are not just your fault.



### **What can be done to help? What is a treatment for dysthymia?**

#### **See a medical doctor**

See a medical doctor for a Medical Doctor for a physical exam. The symptoms may be a result of another illness. Many “organic” conditions can cause depression such as Parkinson's and thyroid problems. The medical doctor may have other recommendations.

#### **Cognitive therapy**

Cognitive therapy is counseling that helps you to learn to think straight and smart. It teaches you new way to look at life that end up making you feel better.

#### **Take very good care of you body—eat healthy food**

What you eat affects your mood. Eating healthy fresh food from the good old four food groups we learned about in school is something you can start right now. Most of the food we eat to make ourselves feel better make us feel much worse.

#### **Take very good care of you body—drink plenty of water**

Not having enough water can make feel terrible. Drinking water is a positive step you can make right away. If you do not like drinking water now, you will discover after a while you love drinking water.

#### **Avoid alcohol**

Avoid alcohol; it makes dysthymia worse. Alcohol is a depressant. It may block bad feelings for a short time but then it makes you feel much more depressed. Many depressed people drink to

feel better. Alcohol tricks you into thinking it helps. It is one of the worst things a depressed person can do. It could be dangerous to get more depressed. Alcohol also gets in the way of antidepressants working. Taking a depressant and an antidepressant together does not make sense.

### **Keep a structured routine**

We work better when we have a routine. We know babies feel terrible when their routine is off schedule. They get cranky, cry and have trouble going to sleep. The same is true of adults.

### **Create a quiet comfortable sleeping environment**

Go to bed and get up at the same time. If you can't sleep, rest quietly. Sleep is often affected by depression. We want our resting place to invite sleep. We have an internal clock that wants us to sleep at the same time. Like the baby we can feel cranky when our bed time changes.

If you cannot sleep try not to tell yourself "Oh no, now I will feel terrible." That thought can keep you awake. Try saying to yourself "If I can't sleep, at least I will rest."

Do you need more help setting up your sleep environment? Read [Depression and Insomnia: Three Steps to Making a Sleep Friendly Environment](#) or [Tips for Insomnia: Four Things You Can Try Tonight to Get Better Sleep](#).

### **Exercise outside everyday for a minimal of 30 minutes**

Do this even if you don't feel like it. Nature helps and movement helps. Exercise effects brain chemistry in a very positive way. Sunshine and fresh air also have positive effects on the body. No matter how tired and unmotivated you feel right now go out and exercise anyway. It will make a big difference. Do you need more information on why walking will help depression? Read [Feeling Depressed, Anxious, or Stressed? Here's an Easy and Effective Way to Help Yourself](#).

### **Think positively**

Train yourself to think positively. Teach yourself to notice negative self-talk and rephrase your thoughts.

### **Instead of**

You're driving home and you think "I can't believe how dumb I am I forgot to call return those calls and I didn't..."

### **Tell yourself**

"Tomorrow is another day. I put too much on my list to get to it all. I did my best" (Turn on the radio.)

Do you need more information on how to change your self-talk? Read these articles:

- [Are You Aware of Your Inner Critic?](#)
- [Changing Your Inner Dialogue: Finding Your Inner Child](#)



**What if you're thinking "Okay, that's all fine and well, but I'm so miserable I have trouble getting out of bed each day, and sometimes I don't succeed. Just making an appointment with a doctor or therapist sounds like a ton of work."**

I know it feels like a ton of work. Tell yourself that right now today you are going to take the first step to not feeling miserable.

**"I'm not depressed, but I think my spouse is. What is a good approach for bringing the topic up?"**

Let your spouse know you are worried and want to help them get better. Offer to get names of professional that can help them. Make an appointment and drive them or go with them to the appointment. Be encouraging.

**What about Janice?**

Jason was the one who made the appointment for Janice. She was too tired to argue with him so she agreed to go with him go to the appointment. Janice started cognitive therapy and she went to see her medical doctor. He did recommend medication. Janice began to feel better, eat right, and exercise; she got herself back on a schedule. Janice still has some trouble with sleep some nights. Janice is much better today. The outlook is positive. Jason got his wife back.

**Highlights**

- Get a medical doctor to look for other causes.
- Take good care of your body, eat right, exercise, and create a good sleeping environment.
- Find a therapist that you can work with.

Dysthymic Disorder can make you feel like a heavy black cloud is over your life. It is not a choice to feel this bad and it is very treatable. Get help and help yourself one step at a time. You can leave the "black cloud" behind you and have a good life.