



REVIEW ARTICLE

HIGH FUNCTIONING DEPRESSION: NURSING PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

“High-functioning depression” or “walking around depression,” it comes with subtle symptoms that some consider it as fatigue or stress. High-functioning depression is a non-clinical term. It’s used to describe a type of depression in which a person maintains normal day-to-day functioning even though they’re experiencing depressive symptoms. This can look like a person who constantly feels hopeless about the future, yet continues to meet family and work expectations. The hidden nature of these symptoms makes it difficult to seek help and manage high-functioning depression.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), depression is typically defined through its symptoms, such as a depressed mood, loss of interest, low appetite, an inability to concentrate, insomnia/hypersomnia, and fatigue and may be present with suicidal thoughts (APA, 2013)¹. Global health estimates by the World Health Organization (WHO: 2017) indicate that in 2015, depression affected an estimated 4.4% of the world population, mostly women (5.1%)². The prevalence rate of chronic high-functioning depression among women to have marginally steadily decreased over the years.³ High-functioning depression is defined as an individual having depressive symptomatology, but can function appropriately in different spectrum of life, like office, school, home, and interpersonal relationships. This ability to function well hides his depressive symptoms, making it difficult for psychiatrist and others to identify. This is not a part of clinical diagnosis.

Warning signs

Common signs of high-functioning depression include

- Anhedonia
- Loss of appetite, but enjoys taste of food

- Being interested in intimacy, but sex isn’t as pleasurable for them.
- Sticking with hobbies or workout routines, but not as often or with as much vigor
- Feeling less rested, despite having good sound sleep
- Difficulty making life decisions, even simple ones, like what to make for dinner
- Spending time with friends and family, but still feels alone.
- attending to the ups and downs of running your business, but the victories don’t feel so sweet

Emotional symptoms of high-functioning depression include:^{4,5}

- Difficulty managing emotions
- Feeling emotionally numb or disconnected
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Frequent comments of regret about the past
- Persistent negative thoughts
- Feeling sad for no reason
- Frequent tearfulness or crying
- Pattern of irritable mood
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Thoughts of suicide or death or suicide
- Increased self-criticism

Behavioral symptoms of high-functioning depression include:^{4,5}

- Lower productivity or decreased activity level
- Less enjoyment of previously liked activities
- Smiling to mask depressive symptoms
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- Depression-induced memory loss
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping more than 10 hours or less than 6)
- Changes in appetite (eating too much or too little)
- Difficulty making decisions
- Fatigue or low energy, even with adequate sleep
- Substance misuse
- Restlessness or agitation
- Increased focus on physical aches and pains
- Depression-induced weight gain or loss

Risk factor for High-Functioning Depression⁵

Predisposition to high functioning depression is same as that for major depressive disorder. Potential causes and triggers of high-functioning depression include:

- Genetic predisposition to depression –Major risk factor
- High levels of stress related to demands of work, school, or relationships
- History of trauma, such as loss of a loved one, emotional abuse, or being bullied
- Biochemistry, particularly an imbalance of any of the neurotransmitters related to mood stability
- Medical illness or chronic pain
- Misuse of substances that affect mood or level of functioning

Key steps to handle High-Functioning Depression

Lifestyle changes which- include improving your diet, getting regular exercise, establishing a better sleep routine, cutting down on substances, and connecting with a supportive social network.

Here are some tips to manage high functioning depression⁵

1. **Acceptance and gratitude to life experience:** First step towards healing is accepting yourself with high-functioning depression and recognizing signs of high functioning depression. Self-awareness allows you to understand self and reach out for help and make positive changes in your life.
2. **Seeking help of therapist or counselor:** Taking professional help is an core step as they helps to teach you coping skills for your depressive symptoms and figure out how to communicate your struggles within your relationships and professionally.
3. **Using community resources and support system:** People with high-functioning depression always feel lonely, quiet . It is important to share your experiences with trusted friends and family members and ask for help with your depression. You can also join a support group and connect with others who are experiencing high-functioning depression.

4. **Self-love:** Take care of your body. Regular exercise can combat depressive symptoms.³Eat balanced diet, hydrate yourself well, and sound enough sleep.
5. **Set realistic goals:** Set regular goals that can be easily reached in order to boost self-confidence and sense of accomplishment. Focus on what is most important and let go of less critical tasks, and break tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
6. **Avoid alcohol and other drugs:** It is common for individuals with high-functioning depression to use drugs or alcohol to cope. However, while you may feel a momentary high, drugs and alcohol will only make depression worse in the long run.
7. **Avoid negative expectation of self:** High-functioning depression have negative expectation of self and environment as well as feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy. Recognize those thoughts and replace them with more realistic and positive self-talk
8. **Participate in enjoyable activities:** High-functioning depression can lack motivation, and thus they avoid participation in enjoyable activities. Schedule time for hobbies, social connections, or anything that brings you pleasure, even if it feels like a chore at first.
9. **Practice mindfulness:** depression can help you stay present in the moment and reduce rumination on negative thoughts.
10. **Balance between work and life:** People with high-functioning depression often push themselves to maintain productivity. However, this can lead to burnout. It is important to create a work-life balance by clearly defining work hours, managing notifications, saying no to extra work when overloaded, and respecting your breaks.

Management: Individuals with high-functioning depression tend to be self-motivated and have very high expectations of themselves, which can make it hard for them to ask for help or admit they are struggling. However, high-functioning depression can become a more severe and long-term issue if left untreated. Therefore, it's important to seek professional help as soon as possible. A local therapist directory is a great tool for finding a therapist who specializes in depression.⁶

Treatment for High-Functioning Depression: Treating high-functioning depression may involve:

Therapy

- Therapy can help individuals with high-functioning depression learn coping strategies, tackle the root cause, and develop communication skills.
- CBT for depression is the gold-standard therapy that involves making changes in both the patterns of negative thoughts and behavioral routines that affect the daily life of the depressed person.⁷
- Interpersonal therapy (IPT)is another effective option for individuals who struggle to ask for help because it focuses on improving relationships and communication skills.

Medication

Some individuals who experience high-functioning depression may have symptoms severe enough to warrant the use of medication for depression. When trying medication, it is not unusual for the first trial of medication to be unsuccessful due

to variability in how antidepressants can make you feel (i.e., lack of effect or intolerable side effects). It is very important to be open to a second or even third trial of antidepressants in order to find the most beneficial one.⁶

Support Groups: Support groups can be a powerful tool for treating high-functioning depression. Sharing experiences with others who understand the unique challenges of maintaining a facade of normalcy can combat feelings of isolation and provide validation. The group can offer mutual encouragement, coping mechanisms, and friendship.⁸

Glossary of Abbreviations (3rd page)

- APA-American Psychiatric Association
- WHO-World Health Organization
- CBT-Cognitive Behavior Therapy

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