

# Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia)

Code: 300.4 (F34.1)

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Diagnostic Criteria 300.4 (F34.1)

This disorder represents a consolidation of DSM-IV-defined chronic major depressive disorder and dysthymic disorder.

A. Depressed mood for most of the day, for more days than not, as indicated by either subjective account or observation by others, for at least 2 years.

Note: In children and adolescents, mood can be irritable and duration must be at least 1 year.

B. Presence, while depressed, of two (or more) of the following:

1. Poor appetite or overeating.

2. Insomnia or hypersomnia.

3. Low energy or fatigue.

4. Low self-esteem.

5. Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions.

6. Feelings of hopelessness.

C. During the 2-year period (1 year for children or adolescents) of the disturbance, the individual has never been without the symptoms in Criteria A and B for more than 2 months at a time.

D. Criteria for a major depressive disorder may be continuously present for 2 years.

E. There has never been a major depressive or a hypomanic episode, and criteria have never been met for cyclothymic disorder.

F. The disturbance is not better explained by a persistent schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia, delusional disorder, or other specified or unspecified schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorder.

G. The symptoms are not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition (e.g., hypothyroidism).

H. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Note: Because the criteria for a major depressive episode include four symptoms that are absent from the symptom list for persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia), a very limited number of individuals will have depressive symptoms that have persisted longer than 2 years but will not meet criteria for persistent depressive disorder. If full criteria for a major depressive episode are met during the course of the illness, they should be given a diagnosis of major depressive disorder. Otherwise, a diagnosis of other specified depressive disorder or unspecified depressive disorder is warranted.

Specify if:

With anxious distress (p. 184)

With mixed features (pp. 184–185)

With pure dysthymic features (p. 185)

With atypical features (p. 186)

With mood-congruent psychotic features (p. 186)

With mood-incongruent psychotic features (p. 186)

With peripartum onset (pp. 186–187)

Specify if:

In partial remission (p. 188)

In full remission (p. 188)

Specify:

Early onset: If onset is before age 21 years.

Late onset: If onset is at age 21 years or older.

Specify if (for most recent 2 years of persistent depressive disorder):

With pure dysthymic syndrome: Full criteria for a major depressive episode have not been met in at least the preceding 2 years.

With persistent major depressive episode: Full criteria for a major depressive episode have been met in at least the preceding 2 years.

With intermittent major depressive episodes, with current episode: Full criteria for a major depressive episode are currently met, but there have been periods of at least 8 weeks in at least the preceding 2 years with symptoms below the threshold for a full major depressive episode.

With intermittent major depressive episodes, without current episode: Full criteria for a major depressive episode are not currently met, but there has been one or more periods of depressive episodes in at least the preceding 2 years.

Specify current severity:

Mild (p. 188)

Moderate (p. 188)

Severe (p. 188)

## Diagnostic Features

The essential feature of persistent depressive disorder (dysthymia) is a depressed mood

that occurs for most of the day, for more days than not, for at least 2 years, or at least 1 year for children and adolescents (Criterion A). This disturbance represents a chronic form of DSM-IV-defined chronic major depressive disorder and dysthymic disorder. Major depression may precede persistent depressive disorder, and major depressive episodes may occur during persistent depressive disorder. Individuals whose symptoms meet major depressive disorder criteria for 2 years should be given a diagnosis of persistent depressive disorder as well as major depressive disorder.

Individuals with persistent depressive disorder describe their mood as sad or "down in the dunes." During periods of depressed mood, at least two of the six symptoms from Criterion B are present. Because these symptoms have become a part of the individual's day-to-day experience, particularly in the case of early onset (e.g., "I've always been this way"), they may not be reported unless the individual is directly prompted. During the 2-year period (1 year for children or adolescents), any symptom-free intervals last no longer than 2 months (Criterion C).

## Prevalence

Persistent depressive disorder is effectively an amalgam of DSM-IV dysthymic disorder and chronic major depressive episode. The 12-month prevalence in the United States is approximately 0.5% for persistent depressive disorder and 1.5% for chronic major depressive disorder. Development and Course

Persistent depressive disorder often has an early and insidious onset (i.e., in childhood, adolescence, or early adult life) and, by definition, a chronic course. Among individuals with this disorder, the onset of symptoms is usually gradual and becomes personally disabling. The covariance of the corresponding features over time suggests the operation of a common mechanism. Early onset (i.e., before age 21 years) is associated with a higher likelihood of comorbid personal disorders and substance use disorders.

When symptoms rise to the level of a major depressive episode, they are likely to subsequently revert to a lower level. However, depressive symptoms are much less likely to resolve in a given period of time in the context of persistent depressive disorder than they are in major depressive episode.

## Risk and Prognostic Factors

Two findings. First, individuals of young, long-term outcome include higher levels of neuroticism (negative affectivity), greater symptom severity, poor global functioning, and presence of anxiety disorders or conduct disorder.

Environmental. Childhood risk factors include parental loss or separation.

Genetic and physiological. There are no clear differences in illness development, course, or family history between DSM-IV dysthymic disorder and chronic major depressive disorder. Earlier findings according to sex and ethnicity are therefore likely to apply to persistent depressive disorder. It is also likely that individuals with persistent depressive disorder will have a higher proportion of first-degree relatives with persistent depressive disorder than do individuals with major depressive disorder, and more depressive disorders in general.

A number of brain regions (e.g., prefrontal cortex, anterior cingulate, amygdala, hippocampus) have been implicated in persistent depressive disorder. Possible polysomographic abnormalities exist as well.

## Functional Consequences of

### Persistent Depressive Disorder

The degree to which persistent depressive disorder impacts social and occupational functioning is likely to vary widely, but effects can be as great as or greater than those of major depressive disorder.

## Differential Diagnosis

Major depressive disorder. If there is a depressed mood plus two or more symptoms meeting criteria for a persistent depressive episode for 2 years or more, then the diagnosis of persistent depressive disorder is made. The diagnosis depends on the 2-year duration, which distinguishes it from episodes of depression that do not last 2 years. If the symptom Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder 171 criteria are sufficient for a diagnosis of a major depressive episode at any time during this period, then the specifier "with premenstrual dysphoric disorder" should be noted, but it is coded not as a separate diagnosis but rather as a specifier with the diagnosis of persistent depressive disorder. If the individual's symptoms currently meet full criteria for a major depressive episode, then the specifier "with intermittent major depressive episodes, with current episode" would be made. If the major depressive episode has persisted for at least a 2-year duration and remains present, then the specifier "with persistent major depressive episode" is used. When full major depressive episode criteria are not currently met but there has been at least one previous episode of depression in the context of at least one month of persistent depressive symptoms, then the specifier "with intermittent major depressive episodes, without current episode" is used. If the individual has not experienced an episode of major depression in the last 2 years, then the specifier "with pure dysthymic syndrome" is used.

Psychotic disorders. Depressive symptoms are a common associated feature of chronic psychotic disorders (e.g., schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia, delusional disorder). A separate diagnosis of a chronic psychotic disorder is made if depressive symptoms occur only during the course of the psychotic disorder (including residual phases).

Depressive or bipolar and related disorder due to another medical condition. Persistent depressive disorder must be distinguished from a depressive or bipolar and related disorder due to another medical condition. The diagnosis is depressive or bipolar and related disorder due to another medical condition if the mood disturbance is judged, based on history, physical examination, or laboratory findings, to be attributable to the direct pathophysiological effects of a medical condition (e.g., chronic fatigue, hypothyroidism, diabetes mellitus). Substance/medication-induced depressive or bipolar disorder. A substance/medication-induced depressive or bipolar and related disorder is distinguished from persistent depressive disorder if the mood disturbance is judged to be the result of abuse of a medication, a toxin) is judged to be etiologically related to the mood disturbance.

Personality disorders. Often, there is evidence of a coexisting personality disturbance. When an individual's presentation meets the criteria for both persistent depressive disorder and a personality disorder, both diagnoses are given.