

# Atypical Depression: Are You Tired and Hungry and Easily Hurt Emotionally?

When most people picture depression, they picture someone who wastes away, barely eats, is quiet and sad. This is not always the clinical picture of depression. In fact, 40% of people experience atypical depression, which looks very different. This is the focus of this post, since I believe that many people with atypical depression miss the signs and fail to get the help they [need and deserve](#).



Atypical depression often starts earlier than classic depression, in the teen years or early 20's. It's four times more common in females than males. The key differentiator between atypical and melancholic depression (which is the more prevalent form of depression) is that, in atypical depression, your mood improves temporarily in response to positive life events. So, I see many female clients who never consider themselves depressed, because when they are in a new relationship or a new job or something great happens, they feel better. Then they don't ever try antidepressants, which would probably help them, because they assume that they aren't actually depressed.

Here are some other features of atypical depression:

- increased appetite (over 5 lbs weight gain when depressed or subjectively feeling you're craving food all the time)
- increased sleep and fatigue
- heavy feelings in arms and legs (i.e., you just don't want to move off the couch)
- rejection sensitivity (i.e., you feel very hurt and ruminate about things your family, friends, or partner said or did to hurt your feelings)

Atypical depression has also been linked to [bipolar I](#) and [II](#) disorders, so much so that [some consider it a variant of Bipolar II](#). The younger you are when atypical depression starts, the likelier you are to have bipolar, which can range from some episodes of [hypomania](#) alternating with your atypical depression (bipolar II) to major swings between depression and full blown [mania](#) (bipolar I).

Note: if you want a quick explanation of the difference between between hypomania and mania, hypomania means getting all your work done in three hours and then finding a new project to really impress your boss. Mania is creating a 100 slide powerpoint that includes special animation and then requesting a special meeting with your boss to tell her the ways that you could be better at her job than she is.

Another note: both mania and hypomania don't only have to be euphoric- they can be indicated by extremely irritability.)

Here are things that clients say in therapy that make me wonder if they might have atypical depression:

1. I'm not depressed. If my life was just better, I'd be fine.
2. I just can't stop eating.
3. I need ten hours of sleep lately to function.
4. I can't get it out of my head that my husband said XYZ last month. He doesn't care about me at all.
5. I'm so tired no matter how much I sleep.
6. I can't exercise, I just feel so lazy all the time.
7. Everyone at work is so mean, I end up crying in the bathroom almost every day.

People with atypical depression tend to ruminate, anticipate failure, find it hard to get past episodes of humiliation, and also [tend to share feelings more](#) which are all reasons that I may see them more often in therapy. And, if they find therapy helpful, their mood may improve during session temporarily, only to plummet back when they are home. Thus, they don't think they are "really" depressed, and blame their partners or situations for their feelings.

If this sounds like you, and if these symptoms have lasted over two weeks, speak to your mental healthcare provider. Atypical depression can be highly responsive to medications, but you have to be careful, because some antidepressants can swing you into hypomania or mania if you have any tendency toward bipolar disorder. That's why I always recommend that people see a psychiatrist for their mental health issues rather than a general practitioner, who does not have the same level of specialized training in these disorders.

Please share if you want to educate others about atypical depression or if this sounds like anyone you know and love. And till we meet again, I remain, The Blogapist Who Says The Silver Lining Is You Can Tell Your Friends, "Hey, I'm Unique- My Depression Is Atypical."