MINDING THE MOOD SCALE

"Keeping up with life's demands can feel more like wading through quicksand"

This specific activity is educational. Below is an illustration featured in *Z-isms* called the Mood Scale, which represents the full range of Mood Health much like a thermometer.

In the very center is a line to represent Perfect Mood Balance, which of course isn't possible for anyone to sustain. Most people function in a normal range of happy and sad. It matters less about how one defines normal as much as that everyone identifies with having a certain range of happiness and sadness based on their individual experience.

Then there are some who must contend with increased instability in either direction, the more typical one being downward. The Mood Scale descends through mild, moderate and severe depression to the very depths of despair. It also elevates above the stable happy range into hypomania, mania up to psychosis and beyond the edge of madness.

This is not a static illustration. Everyone is different. It's also natural for people to dip or rise beyond the normal range, especially with challenging life events everyone inevitably encounters and experience at least a low level of clinical depression.

Also, in much the same way, if you think of the times in your life that brought you somewhere in the vicinity of Cloud Nine, that will give you a sense of the minor elevation into hypomania.

For our purposes, we'll focus on what's above or below the normal range on the Mood Scale where the experience persists for a sustained period and legitimately may be defined as experiencing mental imbalance.

This is where we are no longer in the category of excessive happiness or sadness in which normal, healthy individuals possess the elasticity to bounce back. This is more in the realm of physical brain chemistry.

People elevating into a hypomanic state present a greater danger to themselves or others and exhibit increasingly erratic behavior, among other symptoms. In contrast, depression poses a much greater threat when it reaches a moderate level with the sufferer no longer able to pull out of it. Please take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with the symptoms.

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Mood Scale

Clinical Description: Mood Elevation

Mania and hypomania are two distinct types of episodes, but they have the same symptoms. Mania is more severe than hypomania and causes more noticeable problems at work, school, and social activities, as well as relationship difficulties. Mania may also trigger a break from reality (psychosis) and require hospitalization. Both a manic and a hypomanic episode include three or more of these symptoms:

- *Abnormally upbeat, jumpy or wired*
- *Increased activity, energy or agitation*
- *Exaggerated sense of well-being and self-confidence (euphoria)*
- *Decreased need for sleep*
- *Unusual talkativeness*
- *Racing thoughts*
- *Distractibility*
- *Poor decision-making. For example, going on buying sprees, taking sexual risks or making foolish investments*

Clinical Description: Mood Depression

A major depressive episode includes symptoms that are severe enough to cause noticeable difficulty in day-to-day activities, such as work, school, social activities or relationships. An episode includes five or more of these symptoms:

- *Depressed mood, such as feeling sad, empty, hopeless or tearful (in children and teens, depressed mood can appear as irritability)*
- *Marked loss of interest or feeling or pleasure in all or most activities*
- *Significant weight loss when not dieting, weight gain, or decrease or increase in appetite (in children, failure to gain weight can be a sign)*
- *Insomnia or sleeping too much*
- *Restlessness or slowed behavior*
- *Fatigue or loss of energy*
- *Feelings of worthlessness and excessive or inappropriate guilt*
- *Decreased ability to think or concentrate; indecisiveness*
- *Thinking about, planning or attempting suicide*

SOURCE: The Mayo Clinic

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