

Persistent Depressive Disorder

When Low-Grade Depression Quietly Fuels the Cycle of Relapse



What is Persistent Depressive Disorder?

Persistent Depressive Disorder (or dysthymia) is a chronic form of depression lasting two years or more that affects mood, energy, and self-worth. Because the symptoms are less intense than major depression, the condition often goes unrecognized, leaving people to assume feeling low is simply who they are.

What Does it Look Like?

- > **Chronic Low Mood**
Their mood worsens the more they use, but they blame everything else.
- > **Loss of Interest or Pleasure**
Activities they once enjoyed no longer feel worth the effort.
- > **Low Self-Worth**
Persistent self-criticism and feelings of inadequacy or hopelessness.
- > **Fatigue and Withdrawal**
Low energy and pulling away from people and responsibilities.

How Does PDD Contribute to Relapse?

When someone has lived with unrelenting low mood for years, substances become the fastest way to feel something other than empty, tired, and hopeless.

- 1) **Years of Numbness Drive Self-Medication**
Substances offer a fast and easy way to lift mood.
- 2) **The Condition Hides in Plain Sight**
Because PDD appears less severe, it often gets overlooked in short-term programs.
- 3) **Without Treating PDD, the Baseline Never Changes**
They leave treatment still carrying the same depression that drove their substance use.

Prevalence:

~3.1 million U.S. adults affected (1.5%)¹

Co-Occurrence:

Up to 50% experience comorbid substance abuse²

Relapse Risk:

2x as likely to develop a co-occurring substance use disorder³

Sources: ¹NIMH, Persistent Depressive Disorder Statistics ²Sansone & Sansone, Psychiatry (Edgmont) (2009) ³NIDA, Co-Occurring Disorders and Health Conditions

Long-Term Treatment for PDD and Addiction and Addiction

Persistent depressive disorder is defined by its chronicity. Someone who has lived with low-grade depression for years will not resolve it in a short-term program, especially when substance use has been masking and worsening the condition simultaneously.

Research consistently shows that longer duration of therapy produces better outcomes for chronic depression. Our **long-term, progress-based model** gives clients the extended time needed to address years of untreated depression alongside addiction.



“Persistent depressive disorder is the condition that hides behind ‘I’m fine.’ By the time someone reaches us, they’ve spent years believing depression is just part of their personality. Uncovering and treating that takes time.”

 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Persistent Depressive Disorder

When persistent depression goes untreated, substance use becomes the default way to manage a mood that never fully lifts. Without addressing both conditions, they continue to reinforce one another.

- **Treating Both Conditions Together**
Untreated chronic depression sustains the need to self-medicate.
- **Rebuilding Motivation and Engagement**
Years of low mood erode the drive recovery demands.
- **Providing Enough Time for Lasting Change**
Chronic depression requires sustained treatment, not quick fixes.

Dual Diagnosis:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation’s only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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