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Recommended title: ANHEDONIA: Even When Joy Appears to be Lost, There is Hope

Anhedonia is best described as a person's inability to feel or express joy even when presented with otherwise pleasurable experiences. While anhedonia is often present in people with depression and, in fact, is one of the core symptoms of some who are severely depressed, it isn't always present in depression. Common to depression is an intense sadness, but many individuals who are depressed are capable of still experiencing brief moments of joy, such as a hug from a child or the kind of joy that comes from receiving good news. The joy may be fleeting in these instances, but a person with depression can still feel it. A person with Anhedonia, however, cannot feel even the slightest bit of joy and things that may have given them pleasure, like listening to a favorite song or watching a favorite movie, no longer stimulate any trace of happiness within them. Aside from being indicative of severe depression, people with schizophrenia and other mood disorders also commonly suffer from anhedonia.

Besides a loss of joy, some of the related symptoms of anhedonia include:

- Flat moods
- Loss of sex drive
- Loss of appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in normal activities

It's unknown what causes anhedonia in some patients. In those with schizophrenia, anhedonia is believed to be a part of the brain chemical imbalance that causes the disorder. For others, however, it is sometimes triggered by the loss of a loved one, too much stress or life-altering events.

Just as a sudden onset of anhedonia can be present in some people it can also go away, seemingly, on its own. For others, it is commonly treated with the following methods:

- Antidepressants
- Psychotherapy
- Milieu therapy (Therapeutic groups or communities specially designed for the treatment population)

Some anhedonia sufferers have found relief from their symptoms by the following holistic health strategies:

- Yoga
- Increased physical activity

- Fresh air and sunlight
- Regular deep, restorative sleep
- Actively seeking to increase time spent with others
- Goal setting

Because holistic health strategies focus on healthy living by way of balancing or aligning one's mental health along with their spiritual and physical health, it's important to integrate treatment strategies that lend attention to all 3. For example, yoga involves physical movements along with deep breathing and a focus on renewing one's spirit. Such exercise helps to alleviate the stressful symptoms that can sometimes cause anhedonia and, at the same time, yoga is known to raise serotonin levels in the brain. Serotonin being, of course, a brain chemical that helps in regulating a person's mood. The lower the serotonin level, the more depressed a person becomes. Eliminating caffeine, alcohol and aspartame from one's diet also helps increase serotonin levels in the brain.

It's important for anyone suffering from anhedonia to know that they are not alone. A lot of people suffer from a loss of joy or a loss of interest in life, but it doesn't have to be a permanent state of being for anyone. If you have the symptoms of anhedonia or believe that someone you know is afflicted with anhedonia, help is available.

With regard to medical interventions, it is recommended that you investigate the side effects of any drugs prescribed to treat your condition and that you seek out counseling that you are comfortable with. While antidepressants can alleviate the depression symptoms that accompany anhedonia, unpleasant and undesirable side effects can include anxiety, insomnia, vision problems, nausea and sexual side effects. Often these side effects lead to patients needing additional medications to counteract them. With each additional medication, new side effects are also a risk.

It is also recommended that you actively seek ways of healthy living by adopting holistic health strategies like eliminating processed and sugary foods from your diet, engaging in or discovering fulfilling spiritual practices, meditating daily, exercising regularly and participating in activities that are both positive and mentally stimulating.

Many people with anhedonia have overcome it by focusing on better holistic health instead of merely focusing on how it has affected the brain's chemistry. Some have even found success with supplements such as S-adenosylmethionine or SAME, which has been used for its more natural antidepressant capabilities.

Whichever treatment plan is ultimately chosen, it's important that people with anhedonia strive for healthy living and that those around them encourage them in their efforts. As difficult as it may be to become motivated toward a lifestyle change, it is achievable and the dullness of anhedonia does not have to be a life sentence.

Resources:

<http://www.mental-health-matters.com/articles/article.php?artID=266>
http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/special_reports/depression/anhedonia.htm
http://juns.nursing.arizona.edu/articles/Fall%202002/luna_anhedonia.htm
http://www2.netdoctor.co.uk/special_reports/depression/anhedonia.htm
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/antidepressants/MH00062>
<http://www.raysahelian.com/anhedonia.html>
<http://www.snac.ucla.edu/pages/Resources/Handouts/HOSerotonin.pdf>
http://www.myyogaonline.com/yoga_article_91_Serotonin_and_Depression.html