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Alexithymia

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Definition

A deficit in apprehending, experiencing, and describing emotions, including difficulty perceiving and understanding the feelings of others. In particular, difficulty distinguishing between emotions and bodily sensations that indicate emotional arousal.

Current Knowledge

The term “alexithymia” was coined by the late psychiatrist Peter Sifneos to describe patients who could not find the appropriate words to describe their emotional states. Literally meaning “without words for emotions” in Sifneos’ native Greek, alexithymia is a trait that overlaps with a number of medical and psychiatric disorders.

Alexithymia is associated with somatic complaints such as headaches, lower back pain, irritable bowel syndrome, and fibromyalgia. It is also associated with psychiatric conditions such as anorexia nervosa, autism spectrum disorders including Asperger’s, major depressive disorder, panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance abuse.

See Also

► [Emotional Intelligence](#)

Further Reading

- Sifneos, P. E. Alexithymia: Past and present. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 153, 137–142.
- Taylor, G. J., & Taylor, H. S. (1997). Alexithymia. In M. McCallum & W. E. Piper (Eds.), *Psychological mindedness: A contemporary understanding*. Munich: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Taylor, G. J., Bagby, R. M., & Parker, J. D. A. (1997). *Disorders of affect regulation: Alexithymia in medical and psychiatric illness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ISBN 052145610X.