

Depression and Anxiety



1 in 5 people in the United States has a mental illness. This equates to 43.4 million people—about 18% of the population. Because of the mental health crisis in our country, May is dedicated as National Mental Health Month® to raise awareness about mental illnesses and encourage people to get the treatment they need. The following sections will highlight two of the most common mental illnesses: depression and anxiety.

Depression

Although common, depression is a serious illness that can significantly disrupt a person's work, social, and personal life. There are several different types of depression, each with varying symptoms. General symptoms of depression include the following:

- Having low energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Consistently feeling sad, irritable, anxious, or hopeless
- Aches and pains that are not from other causes
- Loss of interest in hobbies you once enjoyed
- Gaining or losing weight without meaning to
- Eating too much or too little
- Wanting to die

Typically, these symptoms must be present for at least 2 weeks for nearly every day to be considered depressive symptoms. If you believe you may be suffering from depression, talk to your doctor about treatment choices. You may benefit from a combination of “talk therapy” (psychotherapy), medications (antidepressants), and changes to your routine. Each person is unique and responds differently, so having an honest discussion with your doctor will help make sure you get on the right track for treatment.

Anxiety

Recall a situation when you felt really nervous. Maybe it was a test, an athletic event, a job interview, or a situation when you had to make a tough decision. You probably worried about it, and as the event grew closer, you might have felt your pulse race or butterflies in your stomach. Maybe you even felt like throwing up. However, after the event passed, you most likely settled down and didn't think twice about it. This type of anxiety is brief and normal. However, for people with anxiety disorders, the intense nervousness never goes away. In fact, the person may feel anxious but not know why. General symptoms of anxiety include the following:

- Consistently feeling on edge
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling like your mind goes blank
- Feeling irritable
- Restlessness and trouble sleeping

There are multiple types of anxiety disorders, so symptoms may vary depending on the particular disorder. Regardless of the type, anxiety disorders can significantly impact a person's ability to function in his or her environment. Anxiety can also exist with other mental illnesses, such as depression.

If you believe you may be suffering from anxiety, talk to your doctor as soon as you can. Similarly with depression, treatment will likely focus on a mixture of talk therapy and medication (antidepressants, anti-anxiety drugs). Finding a support group may also help you as you learn how to handle symptoms of anxiety.

Non-Pharmaceutical Treatment

There are ways you can treat your anxiety/depression in addition to the methods mentioned above. Making changes to your routine may alleviate some of your symptoms. Ideas for these strategies include the following:

- Find a type of exercise you enjoy and do it regularly
- Spend quality time with trusted family/friends
- Set realistic goals for yourself
 - If you struggle getting chores done around the house or completing tasks at work, consider trying an app called Habitica. It's free and it gives you points for doing tasks, which may help you get things done.
- Limit your time on social media
 - Research shows that people who are depressed and/or have low self-esteem often feel worse after being on Facebook.
 - If you find that you constantly compare your life to your friends' lives based on social media posts and feel worse about yourself, then it's time for you to take a break from social media.
- Try out different stress management techniques:
 - Gratitude journaling
 - Coloring in adult coloring books
 - Guided meditation
 - Tai Chi
 - Practicing mindfulness

You don't have to be a slave to your depression or anxiety. With the proper combination of treatment, you can begin to take back control of your life.

This information was provided by the National Institute of Mental Health. For more information about depression, follow this link: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression/index.shtml>

For more information about anxiety, click on this link: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/anxiety-disorders/index.shtml>