



## **Anxiety and depression**

### **Anxiety, depression and their link**

Many emotional issues and mental health conditions can exist side by side, and there is a lot of evidence to show that anxiety and depression are linked and can occur at the same time in the same individual; this is called co-morbidity. In fact, not only are anxiety and depression the most common mental health conditions, they are also the two most co-morbid with one another.

Anxiety and depression are not the same conditions, but they often share symptoms, and occur together. It is not uncommon for those of us with depression to experience anxiety and those with anxiety to become depressed.

### **What is Anxiety?**

Anxiety is a normal response to traumatic or stressful situations and is perfectly healthy in this context, but if we are anxious most of the time and it affects our day-to-day lives, we may be suffering from an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders include Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD), panic attacks, and phobias, and are characterised by emotional, physical, and behavioural symptoms that create unpleasant feelings of:

- Fear
- Worry
- Panic
- Racing thoughts
- A feeling of impending doom

These emotions are frequently accompanied by physical symptoms including:

- Exhaustion
- Muscle tension and aches
- Headaches
- Trembling
- Irritability
- Sweating

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Anxious behaviours include:

- Withdrawing from things we used to enjoy
- Seeking to avoid people or certain places
- Lack of concentration
- Being really irritable with others
- Sleeping poorly
- Feeling increasingly depressed
- Eating more or less

### **What is depression?**

It is common for us to experience emotional ups and downs during our teenage years and adulthood. But when we feel down, stressed and sad for longer periods of two weeks or more, and find this has an impact on our everyday lives, we could be suffering from depression.

Depression is typically characterised by extended periods of low energy and mood, low self-esteem, and loss of interest or pleasure in normally enjoyable activities. Symptoms include:

- Regularly feeling sad and tearful
- Having a lack interest in things we previously enjoyed
- Feeling tired, low on energy or exhausted
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling irritable or upset easily
- Being overly self-critical
- Eating more or less than we usually do
- Suffering from unusual aches and pains or illness
- Trouble sleeping - difficulties in getting off to sleep or waking up much earlier than usual
- Loss of self-confidence and self-esteem
- Wanting to withdraw from the world
- Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness
- Finding it hard to cope generally with life
- Feeling really anxious
- Developing self-harming behaviours
- Thinking about suicide and death

As we can see, there is a lot of overlap between symptoms of both conditions. It's important to remember that both can be treated and managed, whether we suffer with them at the same time, or individually.

### **What causes anxiety and depression?**

Often, the two conditions are triggered by similar events, such as:

- Suffering trauma in childhood or as a teenager
- Abuse
- Illness
- Bereavement
- Genetic factors

### **Helping ourselves – Tips for managing anxiety and depression:**

- Talk to a trusted friend/parent/carer or teacher – the more people who are aware of our problems, the more likely it is to get help
- Keep a mood diary outlining times when we feel bad and noting down any triggers we notice for down periods or anxious behaviours
- Trying to eat regularly even if they are small meals
- Exercising a little even if we don't feel like it – it is proven that it can have a positive impact on our mental health
- Taking time to do some things we enjoy – even if you can only manage this for short periods of time at first it will help us feel a little brighter given time
- Keep talking once we start– there is no need to suffer in silence or feel stigma about our issues
- Speak to our doctor about our feelings, or ask a trusted person to go with us if it is too daunting

### **Getting outside help and treatment**

A GP may feel it is appropriate to refer us to our local mental health team, for talking therapies such as counselling, and/or seek medication routes aimed at relieving our symptoms. This will depend on our individual experience, how long we have been unwell and what is deemed appropriate for our symptoms. Remember that your medical record is confidential and you'll have the opportunity to look at your issues and work through them in your own time and in a safe environment. No one needs to know you are seeking help if you don't wish them to. But equally, mental health issues are nothing to be ashamed of.

**Further information on anxiety and depression can be found in the individual factsheets on these conditions.**