



beyondblue

Depression. Anxiety.

Understanding anxiety and depression



Anxiety

Over two million people in Australia experience anxiety each year. On average, one in three women and one in five men will have anxiety in their lifetime.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. Anxious feelings are a normal reaction to a situation where a person feels under pressure – for example, meeting work deadlines, sitting exams or speaking in front of a group of people.

However, for some people these anxious feelings happen for no apparent reason or continue after the stressful event has passed.

For a person experiencing anxiety, anxious feelings cannot be brought under control easily. Anxiety can be a serious condition that makes it hard for a person to cope with daily life.

There are many types of anxiety, please see page 4 for a list of the most common. It is important to note that many people with anxiety experience symptoms of more than one type of anxiety.

Anxiety is common, but the sooner you get help, the sooner you can learn to control the condition – so it doesn't control you.

If you are concerned you (or someone you know) is experiencing anxiety, please consult a GP or other health professional.

For more information on anxiety visit www.beyondblue.org.au/anxiety or call the *beyondblue* support service on **1300 22 4636**.



How do you know if someone has anxiety?

The symptoms of anxiety are sometimes not all that obvious as they often develop gradually and, given that we all experience some anxiety, it can be hard to know how much is too much.

Some common symptoms of anxiety include:

- hot and cold flushes
- racing heart
- tightening of the chest
- snowballing worries
- obsessive thinking and compulsive behaviour.

These are just some of a number of symptoms that may be experienced.

If you are familiar with any of these symptoms, check the more extensive list of symptoms common to anxiety on the next page. They are not designed to provide a diagnosis – for that you need to see a doctor – but they can be used as a guide.

Common symptoms of anxiety

Behaviour

- withdrawing from, avoiding, or enduring with fear objects or situations which cause anxiety
- urges to perform certain rituals in a bid to relieve anxiety
- not being assertive (i.e. avoiding eye contact)
- difficulty making decisions
- being startled easily

Feelings

- overwhelmed
- fear (particularly when having to face certain objects, situations or events)
- worried about physical symptoms (e.g. fearing there is an undiagnosed medical problem)
- dread (e.g. that something bad is going to happen)
- constantly tense, nervous or on edge
- uncontrollable or overwhelming panic

Thoughts

- "I'm going crazy."
- "I can't control myself."
- "I'm about to die."
- "People are judging me."
- having upsetting dreams or flashbacks of a traumatic event
- finding it hard to stop worrying
- unwanted or intrusive thoughts

Physical

- increased heart rate/racing heart
- shortness of breath
- vomiting, nausea or pain in the stomach
- muscle tension and pain (e.g. sore back or jaw)
- feeling detached from your physical self or surroundings
- having trouble sleeping (e.g. difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless sleep)
- sweating, shaking
- dizzy, lightheaded or faint
- numbness or tingling
- hot or cold flushes
- difficulty concentrating

Types of anxiety

There are different types of anxiety. The six most common are:

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

A person feels anxious on most days, worrying about lots of different things, for a period of six months or more.

Social phobia

A person has an intense fear of being criticised, embarrassed or humiliated, even in everyday situations, such as speaking publicly, eating in public, being assertive at work or making small talk.

Specific phobias

A person feels very fearful about a particular object or situation and may go to great lengths to avoid it, for example, having an injection or travelling on a plane. There are many different types of phobias.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

A person has ongoing unwanted/intrusive thoughts and fears that cause anxiety. Although the person may acknowledge these thoughts as silly, they often try to relieve their anxiety by carrying out certain behaviours or rituals. For example, a fear of germs and contamination can lead to constant washing of hands and clothes.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

This can happen any time from one month after a person experiences a traumatic event (e.g. war, assault, accident, disaster). Symptoms can include difficulty relaxing, upsetting dreams or flashbacks of the event, and avoidance of anything related to the event.

Panic disorder

A person has panic attacks, which are intense, overwhelming and often uncontrollable feelings of anxiety combined with a range of physical symptoms. A person having a panic attack may experience shortness of breath, increased heart rate, dizziness and excessive perspiration. Sometimes, people experiencing a panic attack think they are having a heart attack or are about to die.

Depression

Over one million people in Australia live with depression each year. On average, one in five women and one in eight men will experience depression in their lifetime.

What is depression?

While we all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason.

Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious condition that has an impact on both physical and mental health.

Depression affects how you feel about yourself. You may lose interest in work, hobbies and doing things you normally enjoy. You may lack energy, have difficulty sleeping or sleep more than usual. Some people feel anxious or irritable and find it hard to concentrate.

The good news is, just like a physical illness, depression is treatable and effective treatments are available.





How do you know if someone has depression?

A person may be depressed if he or she has felt sad, down or miserable most of the time **for more than two weeks** and/or has lost interest or pleasure in usual activities, and has also experienced several of the signs and symptoms across at least three of the categories on the next page.

It's important to note that everyone experiences some of these symptoms from time to time and it may not necessarily mean a person is depressed. Equally, not every person who is experiencing depression will have all of these symptoms.

The symptoms will not provide a diagnosis – for that you need to see a health professional – but they can be used as a guide.

If you are concerned you (or someone you know) is experiencing depression, please consult a GP or other health professional.

For more information on depression visit www.beyondblue.org.au/depression or call the *beyondblue* support service on **1300 22 4636**.

Common symptoms of depression

Behaviour

- not going out anymore
- not getting things done at work/school
- withdrawing from close family and friends
- relying on alcohol and sedatives
- not doing usual enjoyable activities
- unable to concentrate

Feelings

- overwhelmed
- guilty
- irritable
- frustrated
- lacking in confidence
- unhappy
- indecisive
- disappointed
- miserable
- sad

Thoughts

- "I'm a failure."
- "It's my fault."
- "Nothing good ever happens to me."
- "I'm worthless."
- "Life's not worth living."
- "People would be better off without me."

Physical

- tired all the time
- sick and run down
- headaches and muscle pains
- churning gut
- sleep problems
- loss or change of appetite
- significant weight loss or gain

Get support

People with anxiety and/or depression can find it difficult to take the first step in seeking help. They may need the support of family, friends and a health professional.

There is no one proven way that people recover from anxiety or depression. However, there is a range of effective treatments and health professionals who can help people on the road to recovery.

There are also many things that people with anxiety and depression can do to help themselves to recover and stay well.

What treatments are available?

Different types of anxiety and depression require different types of treatment. This may include physical exercise for preventing and treating mild anxiety or depression, through to psychological and medical treatment for more severe episodes.

There is a range of treatments to help, but it's different for everybody. **The important thing is finding the right treatment and the right health professional that works for you.**



Who can assist

Anxiety and depression can go on for months, sometimes years, if left untreated, and can have many negative effects on a person's life. It's important to seek help early – the sooner a person gets treatment, the sooner they can recover.

Different health professionals (such as General Practitioners (GPs), psychologists and psychiatrists) offer different types of services and treatments for anxiety and depression.

If you think that you or someone you know has anxiety or depression, talking to a GP is a good place to start. A GP can make a diagnosis, check for any physical health problem or medication that may be contributing to the anxiety and depression, and discuss treatment options.

For a list of GPs, clinical psychologists, psychologists, mental health nurses, social workers and occupational therapists with expertise in treating mental health problems, visit www.beyondblue.org.au/find-a-professional or call the *beyondblue* support service on **1300 22 4636**.

Recovery and staying well

Recovery can take time. As well as getting treatment underway, the person has to find new ways to manage, and live with, the changes and challenges of having anxiety and/or depression.

While psychological and/or medical treatment can help with a person's recovery, there are many other ways people can help themselves to get better and stay well, such as:

- learning new ways to reduce and manage stress
- maintaining a healthy lifestyle, such as eating a healthy and balanced diet, exercising regularly, getting a good night's sleep, and reducing alcohol and other drugs
- recognising triggers and warning signs
- getting over setbacks.

How can I help someone with anxiety or depression?

It is helpful to:

- let them know if you've noticed a change in their behaviour
- spend time talking about their experiences and let them know that you're there to listen without being judgmental
- help them to get information from a website, library or community health centre
- suggest they go to a doctor or health professional, and help them to make an appointment
- offer to go with them to their appointment and/or follow them up afterwards
- encourage them to get enough sleep, exercise and to eat well
- encourage family and friends to invite them out and keep in touch, but don't pressure them to participate in activities
- encourage the person to face their fears with support from their doctor/psychologist
- discourage them from using alcohol or other drugs to try to feel better
- contact a doctor or hospital if they become a threat to themselves or others.

It is unhelpful to:

- put pressure on them by telling them to "snap out of it" or "get their act together"
- stay away or avoid them
- tell them they just need to stay busy or get out more
- pressure them to party more or wipe out how they're feeling with drugs and alcohol
- assume the problem will just go away.

If you (or someone you know) needs help, talk to your GP or other health professional about getting appropriate treatment.



beyondblue

Depression. Anxiety.

Things to remember

- Anxiety and depression are common and treatable.
- Help is available and it's important to seek help early – the sooner the better.
- Anxiety and depression are illnesses, not weaknesses, and people shouldn't feel ashamed to seek help.
- By talking about anxiety and depression, we can help raise awareness and reduce stigma.

Where to find more information

beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Learn more about anxiety and depression, or talk it through with our support service.

☎ 1300 22 4636

✉ Email or 💬 chat to us online at
www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

mindhealthconnect

www.mindhealthconnect.org.au

Access to trusted, relevant mental health care services, online programs and resources.



facebook.com/beyondblue



twitter.com/beyondblue

Donate online www.beyondblue.org.au/donations