

## Fact Sheet: Depression

Depression is a mood disorder that occurs along a continuum from mild to life threatening. Some mild episodes of depression may resolve with time and recovery can occur without treatment. However, major or clinical depression is a serious, debilitating illness that affects how you feel, think and behave. Major depression is characterized by a depressed mood or loss of interest in nearly all activities, including additional symptoms that persist over an extended period of time (at least two weeks). A distinctive feature of depression is the overwhelming feeling of isolation that it causes. No amount of "inner strength" or "pulling up your socks" will lift the veil of depression. It is an illness and requires treatment.

### Some Common Symptoms\*

Physical	Thoughts	Feelings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change in appetite</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> <li>• Sleep is not restorative</li> <li>• Decreased energy, weakness, fatigue</li> <li>• Gastrointestinal upset</li> <li>• Phantom pains, headaches, muscle/joint pain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty making decision</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating or remembering information</li> <li>• Thoughts are slowed</li> <li>• A sense of doom or disaster</li> <li>• Preoccupation with perceived failures or personal inadequacies</li> <li>• Harshly self-critical and self judgemental</li> <li>• In extreme cases, hallucinations and delusions</li> <li>• Thoughts of death and suicide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sadness, anxiety, guilt, anger</li> <li>• Loss of interest in activities that were once a source of enjoyment</li> <li>• Feeling hopeless, helpless and worthless</li> <li>• An absence of feelings or lack of emotional responsiveness</li> <li>• Loss of self-esteem</li> </ul>

### Some Common Signs\*

- Crying, looking sad, dejected or anxious
- Expressions of hopelessness about oneself, the world and the future
- Blaming oneself
- Irritable, impatient or aggressive behaviours
- Withdrawal from social, work and leisure activities
- Avoidance of work and household duties
- Decrease in physical activities
- Reduced self-care and personal grooming
- Weight loss or gain
- Complaints of aches and pains
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Staying in bed for long periods of time

### Some Common Treatments for Depression

Because the factors contributing to depression are multifaceted, a number of different approaches may be appropriate. Research suggests that a combination of therapies may provide the best treatment outcome.

- **Medication:** There are many different types of anti-depressants and mood stabilizing medications which are found to be highly effective.

- **Psychotherapy:** Supportive therapy is an important part of treatment. Understanding factors that may have contributed to getting ill and developing strategies to build resilience will support the road to recovery.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT):** The concept behind CBT is that our thoughts about a situation affect how we feel and then how we act in that situation. Becoming aware of our thinking, as well as the impact our thinking has on our mood and behaviour, can help lead to important behavioural changes. Research shows that CBT is very effective in preventing relapses.
- **Peer Support:** Learning more about the disorder and different coping strategies from others with lived experience has been found to have a positive impact on recovery. Talking with and hearing the experiences of others who live with depression offers a sense of hope and confirmation that you are not alone.
- **Hospitalization:** Sometimes hospitalization maybe required, particularly if suicide is at risk, if there are concurrent disorders or there is a lack of supports at home.

## Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar is a mood disorder that is marked by dramatic changes in mood, energy and behaviour. People with bipolar disorder experience periods of depression and mania, with periods of stable moods in between. These episodes can last from hours to months. The experience of mania can lead to impulsive behaviour that has serious consequences for a person and their family.

### Some Common Symptoms\*

Depression in bipolar disorder	Mania in bipolar disorder	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Days or weeks of the symptoms listed for depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased energy and over activity</li> <li>• Elevated or elated mood</li> <li>• Overreaction to stimuli</li> <li>• Needing less sleep</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• Rapid thinking and speech</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpredictable emotional changes</li> <li>• Lack of inhibitions</li> <li>• Poor judgment</li> <li>• Grandiose delusions</li> <li>• Lack of insight</li> <li>• Inappropriate social behaviour</li> </ul>

## Other Depressive Disorders

**Postpartum depression:** This condition is estimated to affect approximately 10 to 15% of women and often begins within two weeks to six months after delivery but can also occur after stillbirth, miscarriage and abortion. In addition to some of the classic symptoms of depression or anxiety, women might also exhibit extreme irritability, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and intrusive thoughts about harming the baby. This condition responds well to treatment.

**Seasonal affective disorder (SAD):** The symptoms of depression develop in a seasonal pattern. It is characterized by reoccurring episodes of depression, increased need for sleep and weight gain, typically during fall or winter. There are many treatment options for SAD, which include light therapy, increasing intake of vitamin D and eating a nutritious diet.

\* Please note that signs and symptoms, such as those above, may arise from other causes as well as the topic under discussion here and may require further medical review.

## Fact Sheet: Anxiety Disorders

Everyone experiences symptoms of anxiety, but they are generally occasional and short-lived, and do not cause problems. But when the cognitive, physical and behavioural symptoms of anxiety are persistent and severe, and anxiety causes distress in a person's life to the point that it negatively affects his or her ability to work or study, socialize and manage daily tasks, it may be beyond the normal range. People with anxiety disorders have excessive levels of anxiety that significantly interfere with day to day to living.

### Some Common Symptoms\*

Physical	Thoughts	Feelings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heart palpitations /rapid heart rate</li> <li>• Chest pain</li> <li>• Hyperventilation /shortness of breath</li> <li>• Dizziness / Vertigo</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Tingling/numbness of skin</li> <li>• Dry mouth</li> <li>• Choking</li> <li>• Gastrointestinal upset</li> <li>• Muscle aches</li> <li>• Restlessness</li> <li>• Sleep disturbances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excessive inappropriate worrying</li> <li>• Fear of dying</li> <li>• Difficulty concentrating</li> <li>• Decreased attention span / easily distracted</li> <li>• Speeding or slowing thoughts</li> <li>• Insomnia</li> <li>• Vivid dreams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear</li> <li>• Trepidation</li> <li>• A sense of impending doom or imminent danger</li> <li>• Environment feels unreal and unfamiliar</li> <li>• Feeling detached from oneself (out of body)</li> <li>• Irritable</li> </ul>

### Some Common Signs\*

- Often anxious
- Difficulty managing daily tasks
- Avoidance of people and situations
- Avoidance of activities that elicit reactions and sensations similar to those when anxious (exercise)
- Anxious predictions ("I'm going to humiliate myself")
- Extreme safety precautions to feel "safe"
- Excessive physical reactions relative to the context (heart racing and feeling short of breath in response to being at the mall)

\* Please note that signs and symptoms, such as those above, may arise from other causes as well as the topic under discussion here and may require further medical review.

### Types of Anxiety Disorders

**Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD):** GAD involves excessive anxiety and worry occurring more days than not for a period of at least six months, about a number of events or activities. It is characterized by difficulty in controlling worry.

**Acute stress disorder:** Acute stress disorder can occur after a person has experienced or witnessed a distressing or catastrophic event. The event may have involved actual or threatened death or serious injury. Disturbing memories of the traumatic event cause an emotional reaction and a sense of reliving the event leading to a significant degree of anxiety. Symptoms start to appear within one month of the traumatic event. Symptoms that occur after a longer period may mean the person has developed posttraumatic stress disorder.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** PTSD causes severe anxiety often coupled with other symptoms such as depression. Trauma is a natural emotional reaction to terrible experiences that involve actual or threatened serious harm to oneself or others. However, for some people, the thoughts or memories of these events seriously affect their lives; long after any actual danger has passed.

**Phobias:** Specific phobias involve an excessive or irrational fear of an object or situation. The fear is persistent, unreasonable and causes impairment, severe anxiety, and high stress. There are five subtypes of specific phobia:

- animal type (fear of mice or spiders)
- natural environment type (fear of storms or heights)
- blood/injection/injury type (fear of seeing blood or receiving an injection)
- situational type (fear of public transportation, elevators or enclosed spaces)
- other type (fear of choking or vomiting)

**Panic disorder:** Panic disorder involves repeated, unexpected panic attacks (heart palpitations, sweating, trembling) followed by at least one month of persistent concern about having another panic attack. Panic attacks may be accompanied by **agoraphobia**, which involves avoiding specific situations (such as being outside the home alone, being in a crowd or standing in a line in public) because of a fear of having a panic attack in these situations without access to immediate help.

**Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD):** People with OCD have uninvited or intrusive thoughts, urges or images that surface in the mind over and over again. People with OCD usually know that their obsessions are creations of their own minds, but they can't control, ignore or get rid of them. Often people with OCD will try to reduce or suppress their obsessions by acting out certain rituals. However, rituals may become stuck and last for hours.

### Some Common Treatments for Anxiety Disorders

Treatments for the different forms of anxiety disorders will vary, but all will benefit from professional psychological treatment. Effective treatments include supportive counselling, group therapy, peer support, drug therapy, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), relaxation techniques, stress management or a combination of all.

Anxiety Disorder	Professional Treatment
Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)	Learning and practicing daily relaxation will reduce physical symptoms. Identifying and challenging exaggerated worry and using structured problem solving to deal with situations is also effective in reducing symptoms.
Acute stress disorder & PTSD	With peer support, specialized therapist support, and, as required, medication(s), individuals explore the details and emotions surrounding the original event. Identifying cues that evoke the memories will help prevent the physical reactions. This will continue until the memories and cues lose their power to disrupt one's life.
Phobias	Graded exposure is confronting and overcoming feared situations by developing a structured plan for achieving this. Professional support through this process is most effective.
Panic disorder	The goal is to reduce the severity and frequency of panic attacks, then to lessen the anticipation of the attack. Learning the skills to manage a panic attack will also help to live a more functional life. CBT is a very effective treatment for panic attacks and disorders.
Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)	Treatment may include putting the person into the situation that causes anxiety. Then over time, they are encouraged to resist carrying out the compulsive behaviour until the situation no longer causes anxiety. CBT is a common treatment, alone or with a combination of medication.