

Depression and Anxiety: Know the Symptoms And Learn How to Fix Them

Depression and anxiety can be like flip sides of a single coin. In fact, in some cases, chronic depression masks an underlying anxiety disorder. In other cases, anxiety is a symptom of depression. It's also not uncommon for someone beginning treatment for depression to suddenly experience anxiety symptoms like nervousness, increased heart rate, upset stomach, dry mouth or racing thoughts.

Is it depression or anxiety?

While anxiety and depression do not always go together, many people experience [symptoms](#) of both. Some symptoms overlap, too, making it difficult to determine whether a person is suffering from depression or an anxiety disorder.

Rumination — reviewing a problem or experience repeatedly without relief or resolution — is a symptom of both anxiety and depression. Feelings of restlessness and fatigue are common to both conditions as well.

A few symptoms suggest a person probably has an anxiety disorder instead of depression. These include a constant and overwhelming feeling of fear, obsessive thoughts, panic, frequent heart palpitations, cold or sweaty hands and gastrointestinal problems. Symptoms more characteristic of depression include sadness, feelings of hopelessness and despair, lack of interest in activities one once enjoyed and feeling worthlessness.

Depression can cause anxiety

The consequences of depressed behavior can also trigger episodes of anxiety. For example, a person with depression may be unable to work effectively or make new friends, causing anxiety about finances or one's social situation. A student trying to get through school while depressed may worry excessively about not being able to graduate.

Attacking anxiety and depression

Since the two conditions are so closely related, anxiety and depression treatments are similar in many ways to treating either condition alone. Many prescription medications, for example, are used for both anxiety and depression, primarily the class of medicines known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, or SSRIs. SSRIs, which include [Prozac](#), [Zoloft](#), [Lexapro](#) and others, work by keeping up levels of serotonin, an important mood-enhancing chemical in the brain.

Not all medications for depression are appropriate for someone who also has anxiety or for someone whose symptoms are due to an anxiety disorder and not depression. In fact, the use of some antidepressants in a person with an anxiety disorder can raise serotonin levels too high, a condition known as [serotonin syndrome](#).

Both depression and anxiety disable the brain's limbic system, the system responsible for mood. Neurotransmitters — chemicals like [serotonin](#) and others — produce feelings of happiness, contentment, and joy. The inability to produce these chemicals leads to feelings of sadness, emptiness, and anxiety.

While drugs can repair the brain's ability to produce or maintain neurotransmitters, you do not necessarily need prescription drugs to regulate your body's serotonin levels. There are other ways to do the same thing.

Natural Ways to Regulate Emotions

Exercise, sunlight, and good nutrition are all involved in the processes that produce serotonin. So, staying active, spending time outdoors and eating well will help regulate the mood chemicals in your brain. You can also raise serotonin levels by changing the way you think, often the goal of psychotherapy.

There are several [mind-body approaches](#) to dealing with anxiety and depression as well, and these approaches are especially useful for people with anxiety. Practices like tai chi, yoga, and meditation all focus on controlling emotions by controlling the body and mind. Stilling the mind and calming the body can prevent mood swings and extreme emotions.

Another way to deal with depression and anxiety is through hypnotherapy or guided meditation. Both approaches can help you change thoughts and thought patterns that can trigger symptoms of anxiety or depression. [Aromatherapy](#) can help lift a depressed mood or calm anxiety too.

Some people find herbal remedies helpful in treating mild to moderate depression and anxiety. If your anxiety is closely related to depression, herbs like [St. John's wort](#) and [valerian](#) may help boost your mood. The mineral magnesium, which helps promote relaxation, may also be useful for depression and anxiety.

There's hope

As you can see, there are many ways to treat both anxiety and depression. The first step is to recognize the symptoms and know that you're not alone.