

Depression and Anxiety: Know the Symptoms and Learn What to Do About Them

Depression and anxiety can be flip sides of a coin. 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 begin experiencing anxiety symptoms like nervousness, increased heart rate, upset stomach, dry mouth or racing thoughts.

Is it depression or anxiety?

While anxiety and depression don't always coincide, 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 may be clues that a person has an anxiety disorder instead of depression. These include:

- a constant and overwhelming feeling of fear
- obsessive thoughts
- feelings of panic
- frequent heart palpitations
- cold or sweaty hands
- stomach upset or digestive problems.

Symptoms more characteristic of depression include:

- sadness
- feeling hopeless
- lack of interest in activities one once enjoyed
- feeling worthless

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.

Overcoming anxiety and depression

Since the two conditions are related, some treatments work for both depression and anxiety. One example is the class of prescription medicines known as selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs). SSRIs, which include [Zoloft](#), [Lexapro](#) and others, work by regulating levels of serotonin, a mood-enhancing chemical in the brain.

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, prescription drugs are not always necessary to regulate your body's serotonin levels. There are more natural ways to do the same thing.

Natural Ways to Regulate Emotions

Exercise, sunlight, and good nutrition are all involved in processes that produce serotonin. 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, a common goal of psychotherapy.

[Mind-body approaches](#) to dealing with anxiety and depression are helpful as well, and these approaches are especially useful for people with anxiety. Practices like tai chi, yoga, and meditation focus on controlling emotions by controlling the body and mind. Stilling the mind and calming the body can prevent mood swings and extreme emotions. Hypnotherapy or guided meditation can help change thoughts and thought patterns that 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 steps are recognizing the symptoms and knowing that you're not alone.