
Depression and Anxiety

November 2024

Is it normal to feel sad sometimes?

Yes. Everyone feels sad or worried once in a while. These feelings usually come and go and don't stop us from doing our normal activities.

But **clinical depression** and **clinical anxiety** are different. These are more serious. The feelings last longer, are stronger, and don't go away on their own. They can make everyday things—like sleeping, eating, going to school, or working—much harder.

People with long-term health problems or physical disabilities, such as **Spina Bifida**, may have a higher chance of experiencing anxiety or depression. It's important to notice the signs and talk to a doctor if the feelings don't go away.

What are the symptoms of depression?

Someone with depression may have:

- Ongoing sadness or feeling “empty” (kids and teens may feel more irritable)
- Losing interest in almost all activities
- Big changes in weight or appetite
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Feeling very tired or having low energy
- Trouble thinking, focusing, or making decisions
- Feeling very guilty or worthless
- Feeling hopeless
- Repeated thoughts about death or suicide

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Someone with anxiety may have:

- Feeling restless or “on edge”
- Getting tired easily
- Trouble focusing or mind going blank
- Irritability
- Tight or tense muscles
- Trouble sleeping or not feeling rested

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Not everyone will have all these symptoms. Some people may have only a few; others may have many. If you are worried about your symptoms, it's best to talk with a mental health professional.

What causes depression and anxiety?

Depression and anxiety can affect anyone—no matter their age, gender, race, culture, or income. They can be caused by a mix of:

- Genetics (family history)
- Biology (how the brain and body work)
- Life events (stress, big changes, trauma)
- Thoughts and feelings

They can also occur along with other medical problems, such as diabetes, cancer, heart disease, chronic pain, and spina bifida.

What should family or friends think about if they're worried?

Ask yourself:

- Is my loved one acting differently?
- Are they spending time with others?
- Are they sleeping or eating normally?
- Have they stopped enjoying things they used to like?
- Are they having trouble with school, work, or focusing?

If you notice these changes, help them make an appointment with a health care provider.

What should a health care provider do if they suspect depression or anxiety?

A provider may start with two questions:

1. In the past month, have you felt down, depressed, or hopeless?
2. In the past month, have you had less interest or pleasure in things?

If the answer is "yes" to either question, more screening is needed. Most primary care offices use mental health screening tools regularly.

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How are depression and anxiety treated?

Both can be treated—even when symptoms are very strong. Treatment may include:

- Therapy or counseling
- Medication
- Or both together

For milder cases, therapy often comes first. One helpful type of therapy is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

Other helpful strategies include:

- Doing fun activities like reading, music, crafts, or hobbies
- Spending time with friends or family
- Relaxation activities like deep breathing or meditation
- Exercise, such as adaptive sports or gentle yoga
- Eating healthy meals
- Having a regular sleep schedule
- Avoiding alcohol, nicotine, or drugs

Everyone is different, so it may take time to find the best treatment.

How to get help

You can start by talking to a **primary care provider**. They can do a screening and help you find a mental health professional.

The **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)** has tools to help you find a provider: Search “Help for Mental Illnesses – NIMH” online for more information.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call or text **988**, or chat at **988lifeline.org**. If it’s an emergency, call **911**.

For more mental health information, visit www.nimh.nih.gov/health.



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Resources

- National Institute of Mental Health. (2022). Generalized Anxiety Disorder: When Worry Gets Out of Control (NIH Publication No. 22-MH-8090). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Retrieved November 2024, from https://www.nimh.nih.gov/sites/default/files/documents/health/publications/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad/generalized_anxiety_disorder.pdf
- National Institute of Mental Health. (2024). Depression (NIH Publication No. 24-MH-8079). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Retrieved November 2024, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/sites/default/files/documents/health/publications/depression/depression.pdf>

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This information does not constitute medical advice for any individual. As specific cases may vary from the general information presented here, SBA advises readers to consult a qualified medical or other professional on an individual basis.