

Understanding Depression & Anxiety

Everyone faces challenges in life that may make them feel sad, irritated, hopeless or angry. Occasional bad moods or sadness doesn't mean you have depression. Depression affects your mood, thought, behaviour and health.

Depression

If you are unsure if you are depressed think about how long your symptoms have been present, how severe they are, and how different you are from your usual self.

- Have you lost interest in activities or friends that you used to enjoy?
- Have you been feeling hopeless, lost or helpless?
- Have you been feeling this way over weeks or months?

If you answered **yes** then you may be experiencing depression.

If you have depression, you may also have anxiety. Anxiety is not the same as depression, but there are some common symptoms and they can happen at the same time.

Anxiety

Anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling of uneasiness, fear or worry that is the body's natural response to danger. Anxiety is the alarm bell that goes off when you feel threatened, under pressure or are facing a difficult situation. At times, anxiety can help you stay focused and alert. But, when anxiety is constant or takes over and starts to interfere with your relationships and activities, it is not helpful.

- Are you constantly tense, worried or on edge?
- Do you avoid situations or activities because you feel anxious?
- Do you have fears you know are irrational, but can't shake?
- Do you experience sudden, unexpected attacks of heart-pounding panic?

You might be experiencing anxiety. Anxiety affects your mood, thought, behaviour and health.

Depression and anxiety affect people differently. No two people will have the same symptoms. While depression and anxiety both have specific symptoms, they also some in common.

Depression

Physical

- you feel tired or low
- you have lower energy

Mood

- you feel sad or irritable most of the time
- you feel hopeless or helpless

Thoughts & Behaviour

- you feel guilty or worthless
- you have lost interest in things you like to do
- you have thoughts of death or suicide

Anxiety

Physical

- you feel short of breath, shaky, dizzy, your heart beats rapidly, & you feel a tightness in your chest

Mood

- you worry something bad is going to happen
- you worry all the time
- you are extremely afraid of specific things or situations

Thoughts & Behaviour

- you try to avoid situations that make you feel anxious
- you have nervous habits
- you blame yourself if something isn't perfect

Common to Depression & Anxiety

Physical

- you have headaches, body aches & pains or upset stomach
- you sleep too much or too little
- you eat too much or too little

Mood

- you have problems concentrating
- you feel irritable & keyed up

Thoughts & Behaviour

- you say negative things to yourself
- you might not want to hang out with family & friends

Thoughts of suicide and self-harm

If you feel so down that you can't see any solutions besides harming yourself or harming others, you need to get help right away. Call **911** or go to the nearest emergency department.

Treating depression/anxiety

Most of the time, you will start by seeing a doctor to determine if what you are feeling is depression and/or anxiety. They will ask about your symptoms, any recent stressful events, current alcohol or drug use and any medications/over the counter supplements that you have taken.

There are a lot of possibilities for treatment (e.g., talk therapy, group therapy, medication, etc.). If you have depression and anxiety, both need to be treated. Your health care professional will talk to you about your options. Treatment options should be helpful and easy to understand. Ask questions if anything is not clear. If you are not comfortable with the person you are seeing, it is okay to ask for someone else.

Yes, your parents or caregiver will be involved in decisions about treatment options and medications. If talking therapy, psychotherapy or counselling is part of your treatment plan your health care professional may ask you if your family can be part of a session. It is often helpful to have your family involved but this will depend on your circumstances. Talk to your health care provider if you have questions about how much your family will be involved in your treatment.

In addition to what your health care professional suggests, it is helpful to:

- eat healthy
- be active
- get enough sleep
- practice stress reduction techniques (e.g., yoga, listening to music, breathing etc.)
- try something creative (e.g., writing, art, dance, etc.)
- connect with others
- avoid alcohol, tobacco & drugs
- learn about depression or anxiety (i.e., bibliotherapy)

Getting Help

It takes courage to ask for help. If you don't know where to turn or you want speak to someone in private, you can call: (available in Alberta 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Mental Health Help Line: **1-877-303-2642**

Kids Help Phone: **1-800-668-6868**

Addiction Help Line: **1-866-332-2322**

Health Link: **811**

Helpful Websites

www.kidshelpphone.ca

www.kidshealth.org

www.mindyoumind.ca