Mood Disorders
A Guide to Recognition and Treatment

This handout was written to help you learn about mood disorders and how they can be treated. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to call the number listed at the end.

What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a state of mental tension that can have many symptoms. Below are ways in which an anxious person may look or feel.

- Helpless
- Tired or fatigued
- “On guard” or “on edge”
- Shaky, jumpy, jittery, or trembling
- Muscle aches and tension
- Loss of hunger
- Impatient or irritable
- Distracted
- Have trouble concentrating and sleeping

Your body may have some or all of these symptoms.

- Sweating
- Feeling dizzy
- Hot or cold spells
- Upset stomach
- Frequent need to urinate
- Vague feeling in the pit of the stomach
- Cold, clammy hands
- Racing or pounding heart
- Numbness and tingling of body parts
- Flushing or paleness
- Diarrhea
- A lump in the throat
- Rapid breathing and heart rate, even while resting

Some anxiety disorders can affect daily living and may cause us to avoid things in life. Some examples are:

- **Panic Disorder:** sudden onset of intense panic (panic attacks).
- **Generalized Anxiety:** unreal fears about two or more life events.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:** anxiety that comes after having a severe physical or psychological trauma
How Are These Treated?

Medicines and/or therapy are the most common treatments. In therapy, you can receive help to face the things you fear. Your anxious feelings will go away when you can handle your symptoms without trying to escape the situation. Antidepressants and antianxiety drugs may be useful alone or with therapy.

Prompt treatment is important. It is often delayed because people may not think these symptoms are an illness.

If you have questions about anxiety disorders, feel free to contact your doctor.

What Is Depression?

Depression is an illness which involves a person’s mood, thinking, body functions, and actions. Changes in these areas can last for weeks or months. People become upset because depression can affect their ability to function.

Signs and Symptoms of Depression

To help you be aware of depression, the signs and symptoms are listed below.

Mood

- Feelings of being sad, blue, “down in the dumps,” or worried.
- Loss of being able to feel pleasure.
- Decreased interest in activities with family, work, recreation, and sex.

Thinking

- Negative thoughts of the past, present, and future.
- Low self-esteem with feelings of being helpless and hopeless.
- Frequent thoughts of suicide.
- Decreased ability to focus, remember, and make decisions.
- Anxiety and/or exaggerated fears.
- In severe depression, delusions (false beliefs) and/or hallucinations (unreal sights, sounds or other feelings) may occur.

Bodily Functions

- Appetite changes. Weight loss may result from eating less, but depressed people may eat more and gain weight.
- Change in sleep patterns (too much sleep or too little sleep).
- Chronic fatigue and decreased energy.
- Dry mouth, nausea, constipation, or diarrhea.
- Increased reports of aches and pains.
**Behavioral Changes**

- Some people do not show any changes in their behavior.
- Others may show some of these:
  - tearfulness
  - stooped posture
  - slowed movements or restless movements, such as pacing or hand wringing
  - not being able to work or perform daily acts such as dressing, eating, or washing
- Depressed people are at risk for suicide.

**Treatment of Depression**

Depression is caused by a mixture of many factors. Treatment depends on the type of depression, its causes, and how severe it is. Treatment may include talking to a trained expert, medicines, and/or ECT (electroconvulsive therapy). Depression responds well to treatment. It may take many weeks for symptoms to start to go away. The sooner a diagnosis is made, the sooner treatment can begin and the depressed person can feel relief from the symptoms.

**Mental Health in Times of Crisis**

Being in the hospital or having a loved one in the hospital can trigger a crisis response. When you are in the hospital, you may find that there are times you feel depressed, out of sorts, like nothing will help. You may even feel anxious or in a panic. The tools below are meant to help you in times of crisis. They are designed to prompt you to get yourself into a better place. If these tools are practiced daily, they can help you to cope day-by-day and in times of greater need.

**The Thoughts-Feelings-Behavior Chain**

Your thoughts affect your feelings and your behavior. If you think you are useless, you’ll feel useless, and likely act that way, too. In contrast, if you think you are worthwhile, you are more likely to feel and act worthwhile. It is up to you to decide which part of the Thoughts, Feelings, Behavior Chain you feel is your weakest link. Then, use the other two links to help strengthen the weaker link. Most often, if you are able to change your thoughts, changes in your feelings and behaviors will follow.
A Checklist for Getting Through the Day to Day

When you are depressed or feeling blue, it is good to think about things to do for yourself. What helps one person may be quite different from what helps the next person. Here is a checklist of ideas from which you can pick and choose.

Food & Drink

*Eat well. A well nourished body helps to keep a healthy mind.*
- Try to alternate food you like (junk food) with food that is good for you.
- Eat both nourishing and refreshing things.
- Notice if eating or drinking certain things changes how you feel.
- Avoid sugar, caffeine, chocolate, nicotine, and fats.
- Abstain from alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant and can make you feel worse.
- Make yourself a fancy dinner. Invite someone over to join you.
- Remember to eat, when needed.

Exercise & Activity

*When you’re having trouble concentrating or remembering things, it is good to be more active.*
- Go outside and look at the sky. Look at the clouds during the day, the stars and moon at night.
- If it’s a sunny day, close your eyes for a moment and let the sunlight warm your eyelids.
- Get some exercise while you’re out (with your doctor’s approval).
- Pull some weeds. Dig in the dirt. Plant something that you would like to watch grow.
- Play sports.
- Go for a long walk or a bike ride.
- Dance either alone in your home or while out with a friend.
- Clean your house, garage, or yard.
- Get up and get going! You may feel like staying in bed and not going out. This can make you feel even more hopeless and helpless.
- After eight hours of sleep, get up and take care of yourself.
- Don’t do too much, mainly at first.

Leisure

*Take time to take it easy. Find things that help you to relax.*
- Listen to your favorite songs. Choose ones that are uplifting and positive to you.
- Sing or “make a joyful noise.” If you are self-conscious, sing in the shower or in the car.
- Sing soothing oldies or lullabies.
- Relax in a warm, soapy tub.
- Play around on the computer.
- Watch a comedy or a funny video. Let yourself laugh freely.
- Buy yourself a present.
- Do something unexpectedly nice for yourself or for someone else.
- Buy or pick some flowers. Relax and look at them.
- Get a cat or pet. Cats are clean, warm, furry, and huggable.
Reading & Writing

*Writing things down helps to keep the misery from running around and around in circles.*
- Keep a journal.
- Write morning pages – about 3 pages of your first thoughts of the day.
- Keep a list of goals. Do one task at a time. Celebrate your accomplishments.
- Read all you can – books, magazines, newspapers, the comics.
- Go to the library or bookstore for books on humor, fiction, spirituality, depression, morality, and biographies of others who struggled with depression and thrived.
- Read self-help books on depression.

Sleep & Rest

*Your body needs about 8 hours of sleep per day.*
- Sleep, rest, or take a nap, when needed.

Being With Others

*If you might be a danger to yourself, don’t be alone. Find people. If that is not practical, call them on the phone.*
- If there is no one that you feel you can call, suicide hotlines can be helpful to provide the support you need.
- Volunteer. Put your focus on others for awhile. Help someone in need.
- Give someone a hug. Get a hug.
- Spend time playing with a child.
- Figure out if it is better to be alone or with others, then enter that space.

Meditation

- Pick a small easy task – like sweeping the floor – and let it be a meditation.
- If you are not able to meditate, read a comforting book out loud.
- Pray or connect with your spiritual higher being for comfort and strength.

Keeping a Balance

*Feeling better takes time. Don’t overdo it or get upset if your mood does not greatly improve right away.*
- Be patient with yourself. Don’t set difficult goals or take on too much until your depression has lifted.
- Break large tasks into many smaller ones. Set priorities. Do what you can, as you can.
- Pick something to do that is small and you know you can do.
- Do not expect too much from yourself. Expecting too much and trying to be perfect can only lead to feelings of failure.
- If you are anxious and avoiding something, try to get some support to face it.
- Don’t get upset if your mood does not greatly improve right away.
- Don’t make any major life decisions like quitting a job or getting divorced while you are depressed. You are not seeing yourself, the world, or the future in an objective way.
- Be gentle with yourself. Depression can make you have negative thoughts. These thoughts are not a rational way to think of things. Do not accept them as being true.
Knowing Your Treatments

Depression often requires antidepressants and/or psychotherapy. Though they are helpful, both take time.

- If you are on medicine, be sure to take it as directed.
- Know about side effects and watch for them.
- Do not change or stop taking these drugs without first talking to your doctor or therapist.
- If you need a cold remedy, read the label carefully. Many of them contain alcohol.
- Attend appointments. Skipping them because you feel “too bad” is likely not a good idea.
- Learn about treatments on your own. Don’t rely on your mental health care provider to know it all.
- Seek second opinions if your needs are not being met.

Playing It Safe

Safety is always number one. Feeling that nothing can help is part of the illness. So find help. Play it safe!

- If you are thinking about suicide, be sure to tell someone. Call your health care provider. Ask for help.
- Promise yourself that you will not harm yourself in any way until thoroughly talking out your thoughts with your mental health care provider.

Getting Better Day By Day

Take time for yourself. Practice these tasks daily.

- Work through the suggestions above.
- Exercise 30 minutes a day.
- Enjoy a pleasurable activity.
- Take care of yourself.

Phone Numbers — For more information about the treatment of depression contact:
Depression Treatment Program or Anxiety Disorders Center at University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics, (608) 263-6100

Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Dane Co.
NAMI Dane County
2059 Atwood Avenue
(608) 249-7188  www.namidanecounty.org

The Spanish version of this Health Facts for You is #7209.

Summarized with permission from "Depression and Its Treatment" by Dr. John H. Greist and Dr. James W. Jefferson.

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