ANXIETY SYMPTOMS IN DEPRESSION

Understanding and managing anxiety symptoms in depression
This brochure has been developed specifically for people who have depression with anxiety symptoms. It has been co-created by people who have experience of depression with anxiety symptoms who are members of Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe (GAMIAN-Europe), a pan-European organization representing and advocating for the interests and rights of people affected by mental ill-health, and by SERVIER.

This brochure contains personal insights from people with first-hand experience of depression with anxiety symptoms and can be read in conjunction with previous publications such as A guide to depression and its treatment and Take care and be kind to yourself available at https://www.gamian.eu/publications/.

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Depression and anxiety are among the most common mental health conditions and often occur together. In up to 90% of cases, the conditions either occur at the same time or precede one another. And people affected by both depression and anxiety at the same time may have more severe symptoms than people who have either depression or anxiety.

Anxiety is a natural emotion and part of the body’s natural reaction to a threat. Experiencing occasional anxiety is normal, and everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life. For example, people can feel worried and anxious about problems at work, relationships, finances, or having a medical test. During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal.

However, some people find it hard to control their worries and anxious feelings and having depression with anxiety symptoms can have a considerable impact on daily functioning and quality of life. Although it can be difficult at these moments, it is important to remember that effective medications and/or psychological therapies are available.

Everyone will, at some point, confront anxiety and fear. Most people with depression report they have experienced anxiety symptoms at some point in their lives.

It’s important that people understand this isn’t a choice; nobody wants to be anxious.
DEFINING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS IN DEPRESSION

Some people experience physical symptoms such as a racing heart, trembling, and sweating. Some people find it hard to explain or describe their anxiety symptoms, which for many, are continuously changing.

Anxious thoughts can detract from real life and take away precious time and opportunities. People with depression who experience anxiety symptoms talk of “never-ending” thoughts and how this can prompt a sense of loss and losing control.

Anxiety symptoms prevent them from “living in the present moment” making it hard to make eye contact and speak; they feel cut off from the world and social contact. Things that were previously a joy somehow get lost in the anxiousness and things that used to come naturally are now difficult.

DEFINING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS IN DEPRESSION

Anxiety starts as unpleasant and scary thoughts. It’s like an octopus with many tentacles that can wrap around you. Anxiety symptoms in depression can be compared to a lion – powerful and dangerous!

The interactions between anxiety symptoms and depressive symptoms are complicated, with one generally appearing to be more dominant than the other. To understand depression with anxiety symptoms, it’s helpful to understand what each of them is:

Depression: Depression is an illness that affects different people in different ways. People living with depression can experience feelings of being intensely sad, miserable, and/or hopeless. They have little or no interest or pleasure in any activities.

Anxiety: Anxiety is the fearful anticipation of future danger, which is accompanied by feelings of worry and distress. People with anxiety find it difficult to control worry and to keep worrisome thoughts from interfering with daily life.

Anxiety symptoms in depression are defined by the American Psychiatric Association as a condition where the symptoms of both anxiety and depression are present for more days than they are not over a period of 2 weeks or more. Depressive symptoms include depressed mood or reduced interest or pleasure in activities. Anxiety symptoms include feeling nervous or on edge, not being able to control worrying thoughts, fear that something awful will happen, and having trouble relaxing.

KEY INSIGHTS


Quotes and insights reflect the experiences of people who have depression with anxiety symptoms and do not necessarily reflect medical and scientific evidence or practice.
Conversely, others link it with feelings of low energy and low self-esteem, and with a sense of being unable to do anything “right.”

Although the way anxiety symptoms feel can vary from person to person, they often get progressively worse with anxious thoughts and feelings following a circular pattern.

Some people feel high levels of energy, a sense of restlessness, and an inability to focus.

Conversely, others link it with feelings of low energy and low self-esteem, and with a sense of being unable to do anything “right.”

Although depression with anxiety symptoms can be highly variable, they may often include several of the following:1,2

**KEY INSIGHTS**

- Depression is a lack of energy and motivation whereas anxiety is too much energy, which makes the depression worse.
- Anxiety and depression are all mixed up with one sometimes worse than the other – it’s like dancing tango!*
- The feelings are continuously changing. They just go around in a circle, sometimes with anxiety worse than depression, and then it goes the other way round.

**THE VARIABLE NATURE OF ANXIETY SYMPTOMS IN DEPRESSION**

- **IRRITABILITY**
  - Worry
  - Anticipating the worst
  - Feeling agitated and restless

- **DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING**
  - Being distracted and indecisive

- **GETTING TIRED EASILY**
  - Lack of energy

- **SLEEP PROBLEMS**
  - Muscle tension, pains, and headaches

- **DROUGHT MOUTH, NAUSEA, AND VOMITING**
  - Palpitations and chest pains

- **SHORTNESS OF BREATH**
  - Difficulty concentrating

- **DIZZINESS**
  - Feeling agitated and restless

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An important step toward treatment is removing the stigma through dispelling the myths and misconceptions that surround it. For people with depression with anxiety, stigma and discrimination can make their difficulties worse and make it harder to recover.

STIGMA, MYTHS, AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Worrying about the stigma can trigger or heighten feelings of anxiety.

It’s hard to talk to people if they think of depression and anxiety as taboo subjects.

Self-stigma can occur when people who have depression with anxiety symptoms internalize public attitudes and suffer negative consequences as a result. Self-stigma and internalization make it hard to talk to a health care professional about anxiety and open a dialogue about treatment.

Societal stigma needs to be more widely addressed.

It’s reassuring that people are beginning to talk more openly and honestly about anxiety.

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Five of the biggest myths about anxiety:

1. "Anxiety is no big deal" NOT TRUE. Anxiety symptoms can have a substantial impact on everyday life.

2. "All anxiety is the same" NOT TRUE. There are several different types of anxiety, and anxiety affects different people in different ways. Similarly, depression with anxiety symptoms can vary from person to person.

3. "Anxiety and depression are not related" NOT TRUE. It is very common for people to have both. In up to 90% of cases, the conditions either occur at the same time, or precede one another.

4. "It’s obvious when someone is anxious" NOT TRUE. Although depression with anxiety symptoms is extremely debilitating to those who suffer from it, symptoms can be vague and nonspecific and might not be noticeable to people around them.

5. "Anxiety cannot be treated" NOT TRUE. Anxiety symptoms associated with depression are highly treatable and there are several different options available for those requiring treatment. But unfortunately, not everyone seeks help.
Recognizing and avoiding anxiety triggers is an important strategy to limit the impact of anxiety on everyday life. Some people may not be aware of or recognize specific triggers and might need help from family, friends, and health care professionals.

Stressful life events, health issues, medications, drugs, or alcohol can be an important influence on triggers.

Symptoms of anxiety can be brought on by different experiences and triggers. Being exposed to potentially harmful or worrying triggers can spark feelings of anxiety. But it may not always be clear what you are feeling anxious about. Not knowing or recognizing what triggers your anxiety can intensify it, which can be very distressing.

Although anxiety symptoms can be triggered for no reason at all, they are generally associated with single or multiple triggers. Medical experts recognize that anxiety symptoms are often associated with:

- Stressful life events
- Health issues
- Medications
- Drugs or alcohol

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TOP TIPS TO HELP YOU MANAGE YOUR ANXIETY TRIGGERS

People with depression with anxiety symptoms experience many common triggers:

- GATHERINGS, CROWDS, AND EVENTS
- CONFLICT AND UNKINDNESS FROM OTHERS
- INSECURITY AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM
- HAVING TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE TO DO
- CAFFEINE, SUGAR, LACK OF SLEEP
- SOCIAL SITUATIONS AND FAMILY FUNCTIONS
- NEW, UNKNOWN, OR UNEXPECTED SITUATIONS AND EXPERIENCES
- SHORT-TERM STRESS SUCH AS TRAFFIC JAMS OR MISSING A TRAIN
- LONG-TERM STRESS DUE TO FINANCIAL CONCERNS, RELATIONSHIPS, OR WORK ISSUES

People who have depression with anxiety symptoms understand that managing anxiety triggers can sometimes be difficult. Here they provide some top tips to help you to manage your triggers.

RECOGNIZE YOUR TRIGGERS

Keep a journal or diary of what you are doing and how you feel at different times to help identify your triggers. You should also make a note of what is going well. Make a note of what happens when you get anxious. This will help you identify early signs.

IF YOU CAN'T AVOID YOUR TRIGGERS, LIMIT OR LEARN TO MANAGE THEM

Know your boundaries and try to enforce them. Identify what you can and cannot tolerate in an anxiety-provoking situation. Try to cut down or avoid things like caffeine, sugar, and alcohol. Shift your focus and attention away from your anxiety – exercise and relaxation are great ways to move your focus away from your worrying thoughts. Train the mind to be calmer, more at ease, and less reactive. Meditation helps you to challenge anxious thoughts and to be less triggered by worry.

LET YOURSELF JUST BE

Adopting an attitude of acceptance will help you tolerate situations that trigger anxiety symptoms. Focus on what you can do and focus on the positive aspects of your life.
PART 2: A GUIDE TO MANAGING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

MANAGING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS IN DEPRESSION

Seeking out support programs and sharing personal experiences can play an important role in recovery.

Managing depression with anxiety symptoms involves prevention as well as treatment, and medical treatment isn’t necessary for all people with anxiety symptoms. Research has shown that lifestyle changes may be enough to avoid the triggers and effectively manage anxiety.1

However, many people who have depression with anxiety symptoms will benefit from the wide range of effective treatments that are available, which can address the symptoms and help people lead more manageable day-to-day lives. Treatment can involve medications and/or psychological therapies, which are sometimes called talking therapies.2

Yet not everyone gets help. Despite the availability of treatments, 40% of people affected do not seek treatment.2

Strategies and techniques that promote relaxation can overcome the impact and consequences of anxiety.3

Talking to others and sharing your personal story and experiences is an enormous help. Finding similarities with other people will help you to feel less alone.4

When you’re finding it hard to move forward, it’s important to accept that professional help is most likely required.5

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People who have depression with anxiety symptoms recognize that living with this condition can be very difficult, but there are steps you can take that will help. Here they provide some top tips to help you lower the impact of anxiety on your everyday life.

**ACCEPT YOUR ANXIETY**
Accepting your anxiety can make you feel empowered and can be the first step toward engaging in treatment.

**BE KIND TO YOURSELF**
Reassure yourself that the feelings will not last forever. It’s important to be kind to yourself and notice the good things too.

**CHALLENGE YOUR THOUGHTS**
Challenging unhelpful thoughts and trying to be more objective will help you feel less anxious. Consider the whole picture and change the way you think about situations that make you anxious. Thinking positive thoughts instead of worrying ones will help reduce anxiety and depression. If you notice you’re caught up in a worrying situation, know that you have the power to break the cycle.

**UNDERSTAND YOUR ANXIETY**
Read and learn more about anxiety and depression so you can feel more in control – the more you know, the better prepared you will be to manage symptoms. Help family and friends understand your condition so they can support you. Keep a journal or diary of the anxious thoughts and feelings you experience.

**MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF**
Calm the body to calm the mind through yoga and meditation. Reduce tension and focus awareness through relaxation, mindfulness, or breathing exercises. Listen to relaxing music or audio books, or try drawing.

**GET TOGETHER WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS**
Whether in person, on the phone, or via the computer, social connections can help you feel supported and less isolated. Talking to someone you trust about what’s making you anxious can be a relief. Just having someone listen to you and show they care can be a help in itself.

**JOIN SUPPORT GROUPS**
Self-help and support groups allow you to share your concerns and achievements with others who have experienced similar feelings and emotions.

**SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP AND DON’T BE AFRAID TO ASK QUESTIONS**
Talk to your health care provider so that you can work together to find the best way to move forward.

**LIVE A HEALTHIER LIFESTYLE**
Exercise regularly, eat a healthy, balanced diet, and make sure you get enough sleep.

**MOVE FORWARD WITH SMALL STEPS**
There are many positive steps you can take to reduce the impact of anxiety and depression, and each small step will move you forward.

**TOP TIPS TO LOWER THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY SYMPTOMS ON EVERYDAY LIFE**

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Understanding and managing anxiety symptoms in depression

Do not change or stop your treatment without advice from a health care professional, such as your referring doctor. If your symptoms worsen, please consult a health care professional, such as your referring doctor.

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Quotes shared by persons who have experience of living with depression reflect their own experiences and do not necessarily reflect medical and scientific evidence or practice.