1. What are the DSM-5 criteria for depression?

To meet the DSM-5 criteria for Major Depressive Disorder, an individual must experience five or more of the following symptoms during the same 2-week period and at least one of the symptoms should be either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.

* + Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective report, e.g., feeling sad, empty, hopeless, or observation made by others, e.g., appears tearful).
  + Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day (as indicated by either subjective account or observation).
  + Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain (e.g., a change of more than 5% of body weight in a month), or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day.
  + Insomnia or hypersomnia nearly every day.
  + Psychomotor agitation or retardation nearly every day (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
  + Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
  + Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt (which may be delusional) nearly every day (not merely self-reproach or guilt about consequences of one's actions).
  + Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day (either by subjective account or as observed by others).
  + Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.

These symptoms must cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning and cannot be attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or another medical condition.

1. What are common treatments for generalized anxiety disorder?

Common treatments for Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) typically involve a combination of psychotherapy and medication.

* + **Psychotherapy:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a widely used and effective therapy that helps individuals identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors that contribute to anxiety. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is another approach that focuses on accepting anxious thoughts and feelings while committing to actions aligned with one's values.
  + **Medication:** Several types of medications are often prescribed for GAD, including:
    - **Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)** and **Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs)**: These are often the first-line medications and can help regulate mood and anxiety levels. Examples include escitalopram (Lexapro), sertraline (Zoloft), paroxetine (Paxil), fluoxetine (Prozac), venlafaxine (Effexor), and duloxetine (Cymbalta).
    - **Benzodiazepines:** These medications work quickly to reduce anxiety symptoms but are typically prescribed for short-term use due to the risk of dependence and withdrawal. Examples include alprazolam (Xanax), lorazepam (Ativan), and diazepam (Valium).
    - **Buspirone:** This is an anti-anxiety medication that is not a benzodiazepine and has a lower risk of dependence. It typically takes several weeks to become fully effective.

1. List 5 symptoms of PTSD according to the APA

According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) guidelines, here are five symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

* + **Intrusion symptoms:** Recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s). This can also include nightmares or flashbacks.
  + **Avoidance:** Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s), such as avoiding thoughts, feelings, people, places, conversations, activities, objects, or situations that trigger memories of the trauma.
  + **Negative alterations in cognitions and mood:** This can include an inability to remember an important aspect of the traumatic event(s), exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself, others, or the world, persistent distorted cognitions about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s) that lead the individual to blame themselves or others, persistent negative emotional state (e.g., fear, horror, anger, guilt, or shame), markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities, feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, and persistent inability to experience positive emotions.
  + **Marked alterations in arousal and reactivity:** These can include irritable behavior and angry outbursts (typically with little or no provocation) expressed as verbal or physical aggression toward people or objects, reckless or self-destructive behavior, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, problems with concentration, and sleep disturbance.
  + **Duration:** The disturbance (symptoms in Criteria B, C, D, and E) lasts for more than 1 month.

1. Is Lexapro addictive?

Lexapro (escitalopram) is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI) and is **not considered to be physically addictive** in the same way that substances like opioids or benzodiazepines are. However, abruptly stopping Lexapro can lead to **discontinuation symptoms**, which are sometimes mistaken for withdrawal. These symptoms can include dizziness, nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, anxiety, and sensory disturbances. It is important to taper off Lexapro gradually under the guidance of a healthcare professional to minimize these effects.

1. **What medication should I take for anxiety?**

**I cannot tell you what medication you should take for anxiety.** Prescribing medication requires a thorough evaluation by a qualified healthcare professional such as a doctor or psychiatrist. They will consider your specific symptoms, medical history, and other factors to determine the most appropriate treatment for you. It's crucial to schedule an appointment with a healthcare provider to discuss your anxiety and explore treatment options.

1. **Can I stop taking my antidepressant cold turkey?**

**No, you should not stop taking your antidepressants cold turkey.** Abruptly discontinuing antidepressant medication can lead to antidepressant discontinuation syndrome (sometimes referred to as withdrawal), which can cause a range of unpleasant and potentially distressing symptoms. These can include flu-like symptoms, insomnia, nausea, dizziness, anxiety, irritability, and even more severe symptoms in some cases. It is essential to work with your prescribing doctor to gradually and safely taper off your medication if you decide to stop taking it. They will provide a plan to minimize discontinuation symptoms.

1. Should I be on anxiety meds if I’m pregnant?

Decisions about taking anxiety medication during pregnancy are complex and require careful consideration and consultation with both your prescribing doctor and your obstetrician. **There is no one-size-fits-all answer.** Some anxiety medications may pose risks to the developing fetus, while untreated anxiety can also have negative consequences for both the mother and the baby. Your healthcare providers can weigh the risks and benefits of different treatment options and help you make an informed decision based on your individual circumstances and the severity of your anxiety.

1. I feel off but don’t know how to explain it. Can you help?

It can be really frustrating when you don't feel quite right but can't put your finger on it. To help me understand what you're experiencing, could you tell me more about how you feel? For example, have you noticed any changes in your:

* + **Mood:** Are you feeling down, irritable, restless, or more emotional than usual?
  + **Physical sensations:** Are you experiencing any unusual aches, pains, fatigue, changes in sleep or appetite, or digestive issues?
  + **Thoughts:** Are your thoughts racing, negative, or difficult to control? Are you having trouble concentrating?
  + **Behaviors:** Have you noticed any changes in your activity levels, social interactions, or daily routines?

The more details you can share, the better I might be able to offer some general insights or suggest potential areas to explore with a healthcare professional. Remember, I am not a substitute for a medical evaluation, but I can help you think through what you're experiencing.

1. I’m scared I might hurt myself. What should I do?

If you're scared you might hurt yourself, **it's really important to reach out for immediate help.** Please do one of the following right now:

* + **Call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline in the United States.** This service is available 24/7 and can provide immediate support.
  + **Go to your nearest emergency room.** They can provide a safe environment and connect you with mental health professionals.
  + **Call a local crisis hotline.** You can find a list of resources online or by searching for "crisis hotline [your area]".
  + **Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or spiritual advisor.** Let them know how you're feeling and that you need support.

**Your safety is the top priority.** Please don't hesitate to seek help. You don't have to go through this alone.

1. My anxiety is ruining my life – what should I do?

It sounds incredibly difficult to have anxiety that is significantly impacting your life. Here are some steps you can take:

* + **Seek professional help:** The most important step is to consult with a mental health professional, such as a therapist, counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist. They can provide an accurate diagnosis, help you understand the root causes of your anxiety, and develop a personalized treatment plan.
  + **Explore therapy options:** Different types of therapy, like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and others, can be very effective in managing anxiety. Therapy can teach you coping skills, help you challenge negative thought patterns, and reduce avoidance behaviors.
  + **Consider medication:** A psychiatrist or medical doctor can evaluate whether medication might be helpful in managing your anxiety symptoms. As we discussed earlier, there are various medications available, and the right one can make a significant difference.
  + **Practice self-care:** Incorporate self-care activities into your daily routine. This can include things like regular exercise, getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, practicing mindfulness or meditation, spending time in nature, and engaging in hobbies you enjoy.
  + **Build a support system:** Connect with supportive friends, family members, or support groups. Sharing your experiences and feelings with others who understand can be incredibly helpful.
  + **Learn coping techniques:** Identify specific coping strategies that work for you when you feel anxious. This might include deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding techniques, or engaging in calming activities.
  + **Be patient and persistent:** Managing anxiety is often an ongoing process, and there may be ups and downs. Be patient with yourself and continue to work on strategies that help you.

It takes courage to acknowledge that your anxiety is ruining your life, and seeking help is a sign of strength. You don't have to live this way, and there are effective treatments and strategies that can help you regain control and improve your quality of life.