

Symptoms of Depression, Anxiety, Stress

Depression

The symptoms of depression can be complex and vary widely between people. If you're depressed, you may feel sad, hopeless and lose interest in things you used to enjoy.

The symptoms persist for weeks or months and are bad enough to interfere with your work, social life and family life.

There are many other symptoms of depression and you're unlikely to have all of those listed on this page.

Psychological symptoms

The psychological symptoms of depression include:

- continuous low mood or sadness
- feeling hopeless and helpless
- having low self-esteem
- feeling tearful
- feeling guilt-ridden
- feeling irritable and intolerant of others
- having no motivation or interest in things
- finding it difficult to make decisions
- not getting any enjoyment out of life
- feeling [anxious or worried](#)
- having [suicidal thoughts](#) or thoughts of [harming yourself](#)

Physical symptoms

The physical symptoms of depression include:

- moving or speaking more slowly than usual
- changes in appetite or weight (usually decreased, but sometimes increased)
- [constipation](#)
- unexplained aches and pains
- lack of energy
- low sex drive ([loss of libido](#))
- changes to your [menstrual cycle](#)

- disturbed sleep – for example, finding it difficult to fall asleep at night or waking up very early in the morning

Social symptoms

The social symptoms of depression include:

- avoiding contact with friends and taking part in fewer social activities
- neglecting your hobbies and interests
- having difficulties in your home, work or family life

Severities of depression

Depression can often come on gradually, so it can be difficult to notice something is wrong. Many people try to cope with their symptoms without realising they're unwell. It can sometimes take a friend or family member to suggest something is wrong.

Doctors describe depression by how serious it is:

- mild depression – has some impact on your daily life
- moderate depression – has a significant impact on your daily life
- severe depression – makes it almost impossible to get through daily life; a few people with severe depression may have [psychotic symptoms](#)

Grief and depression

It can be difficult to distinguish between grief and depression. They share many of the same characteristics, but there are important differences between them.

Grief is an entirely natural response to a loss, while depression is an illness.

People who are grieving find their feelings of sadness and loss come and go, but they're still able to enjoy things and look forward to the future.

In contrast, people who are depressed constantly feel sad. They find it difficult to enjoy anything or be positive about the future.

Other types of depression

There are different types of depression, and some conditions where depression may be one of the symptoms. These include:

- [postnatal depression](#) – sometimes new mothers, fathers or partners develop depression after they have a baby; this is known as postnatal depression and it's treated in a similar way to other types of depression, with talking therapies and antidepressant medicines
- [bipolar disorder](#) – also known as "manic depression", in bipolar disorder there are spells of both depression and excessively high mood (mania); the depression symptoms are similar to clinical depression, but the bouts of mania can include harmful behaviour, such as gambling, going on spending sprees and having unsafe sex
- [seasonal affective disorder \(SAD\)](#) – also known as "winter depression", SAD is a type of depression with a seasonal pattern usually related to winter

Anxiety

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

[Generalised anxiety disorder \(GAD\)](#) is a long-term condition that can make you feel anxious about a wide range of situations and issues, rather than one specific event.

You may have GAD if:

- your worrying is uncontrollable and causes distress
- your worrying affects your daily life, including school, your job and your social life
- you cannot let go of your worries
- you worry about all sorts of things, such as your job or health, and minor concerns, such as household chores

You should see your GP if anxiety is affecting your daily life or causing you distress. They can diagnose your condition based on your symptoms, which may include:

- feeling restless or on edge
- being irritable
- getting tired easily
- having difficulty concentrating or feeling your mind goes blank
- having difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- having tense muscles

Other types of anxiety disorder

There are several other types of anxiety disorder, including:

- [panic disorder](#) – a condition where you have recurring, regular panic attacks; for more information, see [anxiety, fear and panic](#)

- [phobias](#) – an extreme or irrational fear of something, like an animal or a place
- [agoraphobia](#) – a fear related to situations such as leaving home, being in crowds or travelling alone
- [obsessive compulsive disorder](#) – a condition that usually involves unwanted thoughts or urges, and repetitive behaviours
- [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) – a condition caused by frightening or distressing events

Stress

Most people feel stressed sometimes and some people find stress helpful or even motivating. But if stress is affecting your life, there are things you can try that may help.

Symptoms of stress

Stress can cause many different symptoms. It might affect how you feel physically, mentally and also how you behave.

It's not always easy to recognize when stress is the reason you're feeling or acting differently.

- Physical symptoms

headaches or dizziness

muscle tension or pain

stomach problems

chest pain or a faster heartbeat

sexual problems

- Mental symptoms

difficulty concentrating

struggling to make decisions

feeling overwhelmed

constantly worrying

being forgetful

- Changes in behaviour

being irritable and snappy

sleeping too much or too little

eating too much or too little

avoiding certain places or people

drinking or smoking more

Symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) affects people differently, but usually causes a particular pattern of thoughts and behaviours.

OCD has 3 main elements:

- obsessions – where an unwanted, intrusive and often distressing thought, image or urge repeatedly enters your mind
- emotions – the obsession causes a feeling of intense anxiety or distress
- compulsions – repetitive behaviours or mental acts that a person with OCD feels driven to perform as a result of the anxiety and distress caused by the obsession

The compulsive behaviour temporarily relieves the anxiety, but the obsession and anxiety soon return, causing the cycle to begin again.

It's possible to just have obsessive thoughts or just have compulsions, but most people with OCD experience both.

Obsessive thoughts

Almost everyone has unpleasant or unwanted thoughts at some point, such as thinking they may have forgotten to lock the door of the house, or even sudden unwelcome violent or offensive mental images.

But if you have a persistent, unpleasant thought that dominates your thinking to the extent it interrupts other thoughts, you may have an obsession.

Some common obsessions that affect people with OCD include:

- fear of deliberately harming yourself or others – for example, fear you may attack someone else, such as your children
- fear of harming yourself or others by mistake – for example, fear you may set the house on fire by leaving the cooker on
- fear of contamination by disease, infection or an unpleasant substance
- a need for symmetry or orderliness – for example, you may feel the need to ensure all the labels on the tins in your cupboard face the same way

You may have obsessive thoughts of a violent or sexual nature that you find repulsive or frightening. But they're just thoughts and having them does not mean you'll act on them.

Compulsive behaviour

Compulsions start as a way of trying to reduce or prevent anxiety caused by the obsessive thought, although in reality this behaviour is either excessive or not realistically connected.

For example, a person who fears contamination with germs may wash their hands repeatedly, or someone with a fear of harming their family may have the urge to repeat an action multiple times to "neutralise" the thought.

Most people with OCD realise that such compulsive behaviour is irrational and makes no logical sense, but they cannot stop acting on it and feel they need to do it "just in case".

Common types of compulsive behaviour in people with OCD include:

- cleaning and hand washing
- checking – such as checking doors are locked or that the gas is off
- counting
- ordering and arranging
- hoarding
- asking for reassurance
- repeating words in their head
- thinking "neutralising" thoughts to counter the obsessive thoughts
- avoiding places and situations that could trigger obsessive thoughts

Not all compulsive behaviours will be obvious to other people.

Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can have a significant impact on your day-to-day life.

In most cases, the symptoms develop during the first month after a traumatic event.

But in a minority of cases, there may be a delay of months or even years before symptoms start to appear.

Some people with PTSD experience long periods when their symptoms are less noticeable, followed by periods where they get worse. Other people have constant severe symptoms.

The specific symptoms of PTSD can vary widely between individuals, but generally fall into the categories described below.

Re-experiencing

Re-experiencing is the most typical symptom of PTSD.

This is when a person involuntarily and vividly relives the traumatic event in the form of:

- flashbacks
- nightmares
- repetitive and distressing images or sensations
- physical sensations, such as pain, sweating, feeling sick or trembling

Some people have constant negative thoughts about their experience, repeatedly asking themselves questions that prevent them coming to terms with the event.

For example, they may wonder why the event happened to them and if they could have done anything to stop it, which can lead to feelings of guilt or shame.

Avoidance and emotional numbing

Trying to avoid being reminded of the traumatic event is another key symptom of PTSD.

This usually means avoiding certain people or places that remind you of the trauma, or avoiding talking to anyone about your experience.

Many people with PTSD try to push memories of the event out of their mind, often distracting themselves with work or hobbies.

Some people attempt to deal with their feelings by trying not to feel anything at all. This is known as emotional numbing.

This can lead to the person becoming isolated and withdrawn, and they may also give up pursuing activities they used to enjoy.

Hyperarousal (feeling "on edge")

Someone with PTSD may be very anxious and find it difficult to relax. They may be constantly aware of threats and easily startled.

This state of mind is known as hyperarousal.

Hyperarousal often leads to:

- irritability

- angry outbursts
- sleeping problems ([insomnia](#))
- difficulty concentrating

Other problems

Many people with PTSD also have a number of other problems, including:

- other mental health problems, such as [depression](#), [anxiety](#) or [phobias](#)
- self-harming or destructive behaviour, such as [drug misuse](#) or [alcohol misuse](#)
- other physical symptoms, such as [headaches](#), [dizziness](#), [chest pains](#) and [stomach aches](#)

PTSD sometimes leads to work-related problems and the breakdown of relationships.

Symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

The symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) can be categorised into 2 types of behavioural problems:

- inattentiveness (difficulty concentrating and focusing)
- hyperactivity and impulsiveness

Symptoms in children and teenagers

The symptoms of ADHD in children and teenagers are well defined, and they're usually noticeable before the age of 6. They occur in more than 1 situation, such as at home and at school.

Children may have symptoms of both inattentiveness and hyperactivity and impulsiveness, or they may have symptoms of just 1 of these types of behaviour.

Inattentiveness (difficulty concentrating and focusing)

The main signs of inattentiveness are:

- having a short attention span and being easily distracted
- making careless mistakes – for example, in schoolwork
- appearing forgetful or losing things
- being unable to stick to tasks that are tedious or time-consuming
- appearing to be unable to listen to or carry out instructions
- constantly changing activity or task
- having difficulty organising tasks

Hyperactivity and impulsiveness

The main signs of hyperactivity and impulsiveness are:

- being unable to sit still, especially in calm or quiet surroundings
- constantly fidgeting
- being unable to concentrate on tasks
- excessive physical movement
- excessive talking
- being unable to wait their turn
- acting without thinking
- interrupting conversations
- little or no sense of danger

These symptoms can cause significant problems in a child's life, such as underachievement at school, poor social interaction with other children and adults, and problems with discipline.

Symptoms in adults

In adults, the symptoms of ADHD are more difficult to define. This is largely due to a lack of research into adults with ADHD.

As ADHD is a developmental disorder, it's believed it cannot develop in adults without it first appearing during childhood. But symptoms of ADHD in children and teenagers often continue into adulthood.

The way in which inattentiveness, hyperactivity and impulsiveness affect adults can be very different from the way they affect children.

For example, hyperactivity tends to decrease in adults, while inattentiveness tends to remain as the pressures of adult life increase.

Adult symptoms of ADHD also tend to be far more subtle than childhood symptoms.

Some specialists have suggested the following as a list of symptoms associated with ADHD in adults:

- carelessness and lack of attention to detail
- continually starting new tasks before finishing old ones
- poor organisational skills
- inability to focus or prioritise
- continually losing or misplacing things

- forgetfulness
- restlessness and edginess
- difficulty keeping quiet, and speaking out of turn
- blurting out responses and often interrupting others
- mood swings, irritability and a quick temper
- inability to deal with stress
- extreme impatience
- taking risks in activities, often with little or no regard for personal safety or the safety of others – for example, driving dangerously

Related conditions in adults with ADHD

As with ADHD in children and teenagers, ADHD in adults can occur alongside several related problems or conditions.

One of the most common is depression. Other conditions that adults may have alongside ADHD include:

- [personality disorders](#) – conditions in which an individual differs significantly from the average person in terms of how they think, perceive, feel or relate to others
- [bipolar disorder](#) – a condition affecting your mood, which can swing from one extreme to another
- [obsessive compulsive disorder \(OCD\)](#) – a condition that causes obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviour

The behavioural problems associated with ADHD can also cause problems such as difficulties with relationships and social interaction.

Symptoms of Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is characterised by extreme mood swings. These can range from extreme highs (mania) to extreme lows (depression).

Episodes of mania and depression often last for several weeks or months.

Depression

During a period of depression, your symptoms may include:

- feeling sad, hopeless or irritable most of the time
- lacking energy
- difficulty concentrating and remembering things

- loss of interest in everyday activities
- feelings of emptiness or worthlessness
- feelings of guilt and despair
- feeling pessimistic about everything
- self-doubt
- being delusional, having hallucinations and disturbed or illogical thinking
- lack of appetite
- difficulty sleeping
- waking up early
- suicidal thoughts

Mania

The manic phase of bipolar disorder may include:

- feeling very happy, elated or overjoyed
- talking very quickly
- feeling full of energy
- feeling self-important
- feeling full of great new ideas and having important plans
- being easily distracted
- being easily irritated or agitated
- being delusional, having hallucinations and disturbed or illogical thinking
- not feeling like sleeping
- not eating
- doing things that often have disastrous consequences – such as spending large sums of money on expensive and sometimes unaffordable items
- making decisions or saying things that are out of character and that others see as being risky or harmful

Patterns of depression and mania

If you have bipolar disorder, you may have episodes of depression more regularly than episodes of mania, or vice versa.

Between episodes of depression and mania, you may sometimes have periods where you have a "normal" mood.

The patterns are not always the same and some people may experience:

- rapid cycling – where a person with bipolar disorder repeatedly swings from a high to a low phase quickly without having a "normal" period in between
- mixed state – where a person with bipolar disorder experiences symptoms of depression and mania together; for example, overactivity with a depressed mood

If your mood swings last a long time but are not severe enough to be classed as bipolar disorder, you may be diagnosed with a mild form of bipolar disorder called [cyclothymia](#).

Symptoms of Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia changes how a person thinks and behaves.

Positive and negative symptoms

The symptoms of schizophrenia are usually classified into:

- **positive symptoms** – any change in behaviour or thoughts, such as hallucinations or delusions
- **negative symptoms** – where people appear to withdraw from the world around them, take no interest in everyday social interactions, and often appear emotionless and flat

Hallucinations

Hallucinations are where someone sees, hears, smells, tastes, or feels things that do not exist outside their mind. The most common hallucination is [hearing voices](#).

Hallucinations are very real to the person experiencing them, even though people around them cannot hear the voices or experience the sensations.

Research using brain-scanning equipment shows changes in the speech area in the brains of people with schizophrenia when they hear voices. These studies show the experience of hearing voices as a real one, as if the brain mistakes thoughts for real voices.

Some people describe the voices they hear as friendly and pleasant, but more often they're rude, critical, abusive or annoying.

The voices might describe activities taking place, discuss the hearer's thoughts and behaviour, give instructions, or talk directly to the person. Voices may come from different places or 1 place, such as the television.

Delusions

A delusion is a belief held with complete conviction, even though it's based on a mistaken, strange or unrealistic view. It may affect the way the person behaves. Delusions can begin suddenly or may develop over weeks or months.

Some people develop a delusional idea to explain a hallucination they're having. For example, if they have heard voices describing their actions, they may have a delusion that someone is monitoring their actions.

Someone experiencing a paranoid delusion may believe they're being harassed or persecuted. They may believe they're being chased, followed, watched, plotted against or poisoned, often by a family member or friend.

Some people who experience delusions find different meanings in everyday events or occurrences.

They may believe people on TV or in newspaper articles are communicating messages to them alone, or that there are hidden messages in the colours of cars passing on the street.

Confused thoughts (thought disorder)

People experiencing psychosis often have trouble keeping track of their thoughts and conversations.

Some people find it hard to concentrate and will drift from one idea to another. They may have trouble reading newspaper articles or watching a TV programme.

People sometimes describe their thoughts as "misty" or "hazy" when this is happening to them. Thoughts and speech may become jumbled or confused, making conversation difficult and hard for other people to understand.

Changes in behaviour and thoughts

A person's behaviour may become more disorganised and unpredictable.

Some people describe their thoughts as being controlled by someone else, that their thoughts are not their own, or that thoughts have been planted in their mind by someone else.

Another feeling is that thoughts are disappearing, as though someone is removing them from their mind.

Some people feel their body is being taken over and someone else is directing their movements and actions.

Negative symptoms of schizophrenia

The negative symptoms of schizophrenia can often appear several years before somebody experiences their first acute schizophrenic episode.

These initial negative symptoms are often referred to as the prodromal period of schizophrenia.

Symptoms during the prodromal period usually appear gradually and slowly get worse.

They include the person becoming more socially withdrawn and increasingly not caring about their appearance and personal hygiene.

It can be difficult to tell whether the symptoms are part of the development of schizophrenia or caused by something else.

Negative symptoms experienced by people living with schizophrenia include:

- losing interest and motivation in life and activities, including relationships and sex
- lack of concentration, not wanting to leave the house, and changes in sleeping patterns
- being less likely to initiate conversations and feeling uncomfortable with people, or feeling there's nothing to say

The negative symptoms of schizophrenia can often lead to relationship problems with friends and family as they can sometimes be mistaken for deliberate laziness or rudeness.

Psychosis

Schizophrenia is often described by doctors as a type of [psychosis](#).

A first acute episode of psychosis can be very difficult to cope with, both for the person who is ill and for their family and friends.

Drastic changes in behaviour may occur, and the person can become upset, anxious, confused, angry or suspicious of those around them.

They may not think they need help, and it can be hard to persuade them to visit a doctor.