

Factsheet 10

Helping Someone with Depression/Anxiety

Depression and anxiety are the most common of all mental health disorders affecting one in four of us in a lifetime.

(See Factsheets 1 & 2 for more information)

Signs of Depression

Depression affects people in a variety of ways but the symptoms can usually be grouped under four headings:

Thinking

They may think things like "I'm useless, nothing ever goes right, life isn't worth living". They might find it hard to concentrate or make decisions

Feelings

They might feel unhappy, worried, guilty, angry

Behaviour

They may cry a lot, avoid people, forget things, eat more or less, hurt themselves, misuse alcohol and/or drugs

Physical Symptoms

They may experience aches & pains in their body, feel tired, have no energy, put on weight or lose weight

Signs of an Anxiety Disorder

As with depression, the signs of anxiety can be grouped under the same four headings:

Thinking

They may think things like 'something bad is going to happen', 'I won't be able to cope', or 'I feel bad so it must be bad'

Feelings

Anxious, fearful, worried, nervous, restless, agitated

Behaviour

Avoiding certain people, places, situations; not going out; only going to places at certain times or only going with someone else or leaving early; increased use of alcohol or drugs

Physical symptoms

Headaches, muscle and/or chest pain, sweating, tingling, numbness, shaking, dizziness, rapid or shallow breathing, rapid heartbeat or palpitations, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea

Each person is likely to be affected differently and have more problems with some symptoms than others.

Help/treatment for depression and/or anxiety

The two main treatments are talking therapy such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and self help. Medication (anti-depressants) is effective for moderate/severe depression or when depression is accompanied by anxiety (see Factsheets 1 & 2).

How you can help

As a carer, you may at times feel both hopeless and helpless in the face of your loved one's illness but depression and anxiety are treatable and the vast majority of people make a full recovery. With a good understanding of the illness you can play an important part in this. Through a well informed, caring and supportive approach carers can, working alongside the person who is ill and their doctor, speed recovery, prevent relationship and family breakdown and avoid



other potentially negative consequences of the illness such as unemployment, alcohol abuse, financial difficulties or even suicide.

The following tips will be helpful:

- Encourage them to tell you how they feel
- Try to be a good listener – even if you hear the same thing several times
- Remind them that depression is treatable and is not their fault
- Keep reassuring them that they will get better
- Encourage them to get some regular exercise and to eat a balanced diet
- Encourage them to practice relaxation techniques
- Encourage them to see their GP. Offer to accompany them to appointments to help them describe their symptoms, or ask any questions they may have, but it's also important that they have time with the GP on their own
- Help them to avoid alcohol, or at least keep it within safe limits
- Encourage them to reduce their intake of caffeine if they have anxiety
- Take them seriously if they talk about feeling hopeless or suicidal and seek professional help straight away (see below)

How you may be affected

Caring for someone with depression or anxiety can be difficult, stressful and lonely, but help and support are available

You may feel:

- impatient with the person's behaviour
- exhausted by listening and caring
- isolated from your friends

You may worry about:

- losing the person you knew
- coping and asking for help
- the future, including money problems
- stigma – what other people might be thinking or saying
- the person's safety and the risk of suicide

Taking care of yourself

- Share your worries with trusted friends and family members – but do respect the person's right to privacy
- Call the Aware helpline for information and support
- Don't struggle on alone; ask for help when you feel you need it
- Make time for yourself and leisure activities
- Make sure you eat well and get enough exercise
- Go and see your own doctor if you find it hard to sleep or are anxious or depressed
- Ask if a family support worker is available

Lifeline is a telephone help and counselling service for anyone in distress or despair. It is available 24/7 and is free from mobiles. Trained counsellors, experienced in issues such as depression, self-harm and suicide will listen and give confidential help and support. They can give immediate support, offer a face-to-face appointment, or signpost you to other services in your area.

Call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000.

Alternatively, you could call your GP, the out-of-hours GP service, or emergency services on 999. See our Factsheet 3 for more information on looking after your mental health.



For details about our other services, publications and fact sheets, or for general information about our charity, visit our website: www.aware-ni.org.uk or call our helpline on 08451 20 29 61

