

# Understanding anxiety and depression



# Anxiety

**On average, one in three women and one in five men will experience anxiety in their lifetime. Around 2 million people in Australia live with anxiety each year.<sup>1</sup>**

## What is anxiety?

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. While stress and anxious feelings are a common response to a situation where we feel under pressure, they usually pass once the stressful situation has passed, or 'stressor' is removed.

Anxiety is when these anxious feelings don't go away – when they're ongoing and happen without any particular reason or cause. It's a serious condition that makes it hard to cope with daily life. Everyone feels anxious from time to time, but for someone experiencing anxiety, these feelings aren't easily controlled.

There are different types of anxiety (see page 4 for a list of the most common). Many people with anxiety experience symptoms of more than one type of anxiety, and may experience depression as well.

It's important to seek support early if you're experiencing anxiety. Your symptoms may not go away on their own and if left untreated, they can start to escalate.

**If you are concerned you (or someone you know) is experiencing anxiety, consult a GP or other health professional.**

For more information on anxiety visit **[beyondblue.org.au/anxiety](https://beyondblue.org.au/anxiety)** or contact the *beyondblue* Support Service or join our forums at **[beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](https://beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)**

The information in this document is general advice only. The advice within it may therefore not apply to your circumstances and is not intended to replace the advice of a healthcare professional.



## How do you know if you have anxiety?

The symptoms of anxiety are sometimes not all that obvious as they often develop slowly and, given that we all experience some anxiety at various points in our lives, it can be hard to know how much is too much.

Some common symptoms of anxiety include:

- hot and cold flushes
- racing heart
- tightening of the chest
- excessive fear or worry
- obsessive thinking and compulsive behaviour.

These are just some of a number of symptoms that you might experience.

If you are familiar with any of these symptoms, check the more extensive list of symptoms common to anxiety on the next page. They're not designed to provide a diagnosis – for that you'll need to see a doctor – but they can be used as a guide.

You can also complete our simple checklist at **[beyondblue.org.au/checklist](https://beyondblue.org.au/checklist)** to give you more insight.

## Common symptoms of anxiety

### Behaviour

- withdrawing from, avoiding, or fearing objects or situations which cause anxiety
- urges to perform certain rituals in a bid to relieve anxiety
- not being assertive (i.e. avoiding eye contact)
- difficulty making decisions
- being startled easily

### Feelings

- overwhelmed
- fear (particularly when having to face certain objects, situations or events)
- worried about physical symptoms (e.g. fearing there is an undiagnosed medical problem)
- dread (e.g. that something bad is going to happen)
- constantly tense, nervous or on edge
- uncontrollable or overwhelming panic

### Thoughts

- "I'm going crazy."
- "I can't control myself."
- "I'm about to die."
- "People are judging me."
- having upsetting dreams or flashbacks of a traumatic event
- finding it hard to stop worrying
- unwanted or intrusive thoughts

### Physical

- increased heart rate/racing heart
- shortness of breath
- vomiting, nausea or pain in the stomach
- muscle tension and pain (e.g. sore back or jaw)
- feeling detached from your physical self or surroundings
- having trouble sleeping (e.g. difficulty falling or staying asleep or restless sleep)
- sweating, shaking
- dizzy, lightheaded or faint
- numbness or tingling
- hot or cold flushes
- difficulty concentrating

## Types of anxiety

There are different types of anxiety. The six most common are:

### Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)

A person feels anxious on most days, worrying about lots of different things, for a period of six months or more.

### Social phobia

A person has an intense fear of being criticised, embarrassed or humiliated, even in everyday situations, such as speaking publicly, eating in public, being assertive at work or making small talk.

### Specific phobias

A person feels very fearful about a particular object or situation and may go to great lengths to avoid it, for example, having an injection or travelling on a plane. There are many different types of phobias.

### Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

A person has ongoing unwanted/intrusive thoughts and fears that cause anxiety. Although the person may acknowledge these thoughts as silly, they often try to relieve their anxiety by carrying out certain behaviours or rituals. For example, a fear of germs and contamination can lead to constant washing of hands and clothes.

### Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

This can happen any time from one month after a person experiences a traumatic event (e.g. war, assault, accident, disaster). Symptoms can include difficulty relaxing, upsetting dreams or flashbacks of the event, and avoidance of anything related to the event.

### Panic disorder

A person has panic attacks, which are intense, overwhelming and often uncontrollable feelings of anxiety combined with a range of physical symptoms. Someone having a panic attack may experience shortness of breath, chest pain, dizziness and excessive perspiration. Sometimes, people experiencing a panic attack think they are having a heart attack or are about to die.

For more information on the different types of anxiety visit [beyondblue.org.au/types-of-anxiety](https://beyondblue.org.au/types-of-anxiety)

# Depression

**Around 1 million people in Australia live with depression each year. On average, one in six women and one in eight men will experience depression in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup>**

## **What is depression?**

While we all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason.

Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious condition that affects your physical and mental health.

Depression affects how you feel about yourself and makes life more difficult to manage from day to day.

The encouraging news is that there are a range of treatments, health professionals and services available to help with depression, as well as information on what you can do to help yourself.





## How do you know if you have depression?

You may be depressed if, for more than two weeks, you've felt sad, down or miserable most of the time, or have lost interest or pleasure in usual activities, and have also experienced several of the signs and symptoms across at least three of the categories on the next page.

It's important to remember that we all experience some of these symptoms from time to time and it may not necessarily mean you're depressed. Equally, not everyone who is experiencing depression will have all of these symptoms.

The symptoms will not provide a diagnosis – for that you'll need to see a health professional – but they can help to guide you and provide a better understanding of how you're feeling.

You can also complete our simple checklist at **[beyondblue.org.au/checklist](https://beyondblue.org.au/checklist)** to give you more insight.

**If you are concerned you (or someone you know) is experiencing depression, consult a GP or other health professional.**

For more information on depression visit **[beyondblue.org.au/depression](https://beyondblue.org.au/depression)** or contact the *beyondblue* Support Service or join our online forums at **[beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](https://beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)**

## Common symptoms of depression

### Behaviour

- not going out anymore
- not getting things done at work/school
- withdrawing from close family and friends
- relying on alcohol and sedatives
- not doing usual enjoyable activities
- unable to concentrate

### Feelings

- overwhelmed
- guilty
- irritable
- frustrated
- lacking in confidence
- unhappy
- indecisive
- disappointed
- miserable
- sad

### Thoughts

- "I'm a failure."
- "It's my fault."
- "Nothing good ever happens to me."
- "I'm worthless."
- "Life's not worth living."
- "People would be better off without me."

### Physical

- tired all the time
- sick and run down
- headaches and muscle pains
- churning gut
- sleep problems
- loss or change of appetite
- significant weight loss or gain



# Get support

**People with anxiety and/or depression can find it difficult to take the first step in seeking support. They may need the support of family, friends and a health professional.**

There is no one proven way that people recover from anxiety or depression. However, there are a range of effective treatments and health professionals who can help people on the road to recovery.

There are plenty of things you can do for yourself to recover and stay well.

## **What treatments are available?**

Different types of anxiety and depression require different types of treatment. This may include physical exercise for preventing and treating mild anxiety or depression, through to psychological and medical treatment for more severe symptoms.

There are a range of treatments to help, but it's different for everybody. **The important thing is finding the right treatment and the right health professional that works for you.**

For more, visit [beyondblue.org.au/treatment-options](https://beyondblue.org.au/treatment-options)



## Who can assist

Anxiety and depression can go on for months, sometimes years, if left untreated, and can have many negative effects on your life. It's important to seek support early – the sooner you get treatment, the sooner you can recover.

Different health professionals offer different types of services and treatments for anxiety and depression.

If you think that you or someone you know has anxiety or depression, talking to a GP is a good place to start. A GP can make a diagnosis, check for any physical health problem or medication that may be contributing to the anxiety and/or depression, and discuss treatment options.

For more, visit **[beyondblue.org.au/who-can-assist](https://beyondblue.org.au/who-can-assist)**

For a list of GPs, clinical psychologists, psychologists, mental health nurses, social workers and occupational therapists with expertise in treating mental health conditions, visit **[beyondblue.org.au/find-a-professional](https://beyondblue.org.au/find-a-professional)**

## Recovery and staying well

Recovery can take time. As well as getting treatment underway, you'll find new ways to manage and live with the changes and challenges of having anxiety and/or depression.

While psychological and/or medical treatment can help with a person's recovery, there are many other ways people can help themselves to get better and stay well, such as:

- learning new ways to reduce and manage stress
- maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- cutting back on alcohol and other drugs
- recognising triggers and warning signs
- getting over setbacks.

For more on recovery and staying well, visit **[beyondblue.org.au/recovery-and-staying-well](https://beyondblue.org.au/recovery-and-staying-well)**

## How can I support someone with anxiety or depression?

### It is helpful to:

- let them know if you've noticed a change in their behaviour
- spend time talking about their experiences and let them know that you're there to listen without judgment
- help them to get information from a website, library or community health centre
- suggest they go to a doctor or health professional, and help them to make an appointment
- offer to go with them to their appointment
- encourage them to get enough sleep, exercise and to eat well
- encourage family and friends to invite them out and keep in touch, but don't pressure them to participate in activities
- encourage them to face their fears with support from their doctor/psychologist
- discourage them from using alcohol or other drugs to try to feel better
- contact a doctor or hospital if they become a threat to themselves or others.

### It is unhelpful to:

- put pressure on them by telling them to "snap out of it" or "get their act together"
- stay away or avoid them
- tell them they just need to stay busy or get out more
- pressure them to party more or wipe out how they're feeling with drugs and alcohol.

**If you (or someone you know) needs help, talk to your GP or other health professional about getting appropriate treatment.**

For more information on talking to someone about anxiety and depression, visit **[beyondblue.org.au/supporting-someone-with-anxiety-or-depression](https://beyondblue.org.au/supporting-someone-with-anxiety-or-depression)**



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