

# Anxiety, Depression And Manic Depression

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## Anxiety, Depression And Manic Depression

Anxiousness and changing moods? So what?

Aren't they something we all go through?

Aren't they helpful in their own way?

After all, anxiety can spur us on to prepare for an upcoming task. It can help us face danger. Depression can slow us down, offer us time to reflect and regroup. An energetic mood can help us accomplish necessary tasks.

In everyday language, the words "anxiety" and "depression" describe moods that are familiar to us.

But when anxiety or depression ...

... seem to come out of nowhere ...

... persist for many weeks without relief...

... interfere with everyday life...

... then we're not talking about ordinary moods anymore. We're talking about an illness.

### What are anxiety, depression and manic depression?

Anxiety and depression are among the most common, most treatable forms of mental illness in Canada.

#### Anxiety

People with an anxiety disorder may have a number of physical symptoms, including shakiness, muscle aches, sweating, cold and clammy hands, dizziness, fatigue, racing heart and dry mouth. Emotionally they may feel irritable and apprehensive, fearing that bad things are about to happen to themselves or to their loved ones.

But possibly the most noticeable consequence of anxiety is the way it so often leaves its sufferers practically disabled. Imagine what it must be like to be too frightened to get in an elevator. To go to your office. To attend parties. At its most debilitating, anxiety can keep sufferers trapped in their homes, too frightened to so much as open the door.

Anxiety can be broken down into several types. People experiencing symptoms of anxiety should realize that it is a common disorder which is very treatable.

#### Phobia

This term describes the kind of terror, dread or panic that overwhelms anxiety sufferers when they are faced with a feared object, situation or activity. Many common phobias are familiar to us: fear of snakes, enclosed spaces, airplanes are just a few.

Other phobias are less well known. Something as simple as a business lunch may turn into a nightmare for someone with a fear of eating in front of others. Agoraphobia, the fear of being in a public space with no escape, like a bus or a crowded store, can leave the person housebound.

#### Panic Disorder

People with Panic Disorder suffer sudden intense overwhelming terror for no apparent reason. Their fear is accompanied by other symptoms, including sweating, heart palpitations, hot or cold flashes, choking or smothering and feelings of unreality.

## **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**

For people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, obsessions are a way of coping with their anxieties: repeated, unwanted thoughts or compulsive behaviours, rituals that get out of control. A person may deal with, for example, unwanted sexual thoughts, by cleaning themselves so compulsively their hands bleed.

## **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder**

This can affect anyone who has survived a severe and unusual physical or mental trauma. Witnesses to a violent auto accident or survivors of a life-threatening crime may develop this illness, which tends to be more severe the less it is expected.

Some victims find themselves re-experiencing the traumatic events through nightmares, night terrors or flashbacks. Others numb themselves emotionally, startle easily, are plagued by general anxiety, inability to sleep, poor memory difficulty concentrating or completing tasks, and feel guilty about their own survival.

## **Depression**

One in four women and one in ten men can expect to be diagnosed with depression at some point in their lives, though very often it goes unrecognized. They may not realize that what they are experiencing are symptoms of a potentially treatable illness.

And that's too bad. Because when depression is recognized and treated, the success rate is high.

Signs to look for are continuing feelings of sadness, of helplessness, hopelessness and irritability, and the inability to keep up with the basic parts of life such as personal care, household chores, friendships and social activities. Other symptoms include: a noticeable change of appetite that brings about a significant gain or loss of weight, problems sleeping or waking, sudden loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed, an inability to concentrate and make decisions, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, headache and stomachache.

People experiencing depression may have thoughts of suicide. Many doctors believe, in fact, that depression is the illness that underlies the majority of suicides in Canada. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among people between the ages of 15 to 24. It is important to always remember, that help is available for depressive illnesses. In the past 10 to 20 years there have been major developments in their treatment.

Later in life the symptoms of depression - including memory impairment, slowed speech and movement - can be mistaken for those of senility or stroke.

Depression can strike at any age. Its emotional and physical symptoms are notable for their persistence. Many people experiencing depression find it hard to do anything at all, even to get up enough energy to call a doctor. But taking that first step may start them on the road to recovery. There is always help available. See your doctor if you or a family member or friend are showing signs of depression. Ask about psychiatric or psychological treatment and the important role of support groups.

## **Manic Depression**

Manic depression is a treatable illness which is found in about one percent of the population. It often first occurs in the late teens or early '20s. People with manic depression experience periods of depression as described earlier, as well as periods of mania. During an episode of mania, a person may have some or all of the following symptoms: excessive energy, racing flights of ideas, vigorous denial that anything is wrong, pressured speech, grandiose thoughts or inflated self-esteem, overspending, high heart rate and irregular breathing, alternating decreases and increases of sleep, impaired judgement, extreme irritability or rapid, unpredictable mood changes.

## **Theories about causes**

There is no single cause of anxiety or depression. Rather, physical and environmental triggers may combine to give rise to anxiety, depression, or manic depression in certain people.

Some scientists believe that anxiety is a learned response, that people are taught to fear situations or objects. Some psychoanalytic theories suggest that anxiety stems from an unconscious conflict, an illness, fright, or emotionally laden event that happened to a person as a child.

Life events and the way you have learned to respond to them may make you more likely to experience depression. Some medications for other illnesses can cause depression or mania, as can a medical illness. Stress can bring on depression or mania in susceptible individuals.

Finally, in studying anxiety, depression and manic depression, scientists are learning the importance of genetics and brain biochemistry. Biochemical imbalances seem more and more to be a significant part of the problem.

## Treatments

Anxiety, depression and manic depression are illnesses that can be treated very successfully with a combination of psychotherapy and medication.

Anti-anxiety medications, anti-depressants, mood stabilizers and other medications aimed at alleviating symptoms are widely available through physicians. In cases of depression where other treatments have failed or are not possible, electroconvulsive therapy has been used with success. Also self-help support groups help people feel less isolated in that people can hear the words of others who have been through similar experiences.

## Reclaiming lives

Anxiousness and changing moods are part of everyone's life. That is a fact that should help us understand those in need, not discourage them from seeking treatment.

Anxiety keeps many Canadians feeling frightened and alone. Depression, many doctors believe, is the underlying cause of most suicides in Canada. Manic depression is a psychiatric illness which when treated allows people to return to lead creative, steady lives.

With proper treatment, the suffering can end. There is more than just hope for success, there is abundant evidence of it. Lives can be reclaimed. Help is within reach.

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