**Anxiety & Depression**

Anxiety and depression are often linked together simply because feeling depressed i.e. feeling very low can often leave someone feeling very anxious and unable to cope, in fact there is evidence to suggest that almost half of people who suffer from one condition will suffer from both.

I’ll start with Depression, there is unfortunately a very common view that it’s all in your mind and that you need to “snap out of it”, there is also the very common view that you’re just feeling a bit low, but that’s not at all how it is, and it is unfortunately not as simple as that. Everybody experiences low mood at some point in their lives and most of these people will over a period bounce back without any help. Statistics show though that 25% of us will suffer from depression in varying degrees, and that’s quite a staggering thought.

Depression is more than just a feeling it is in fact a medical condition and it is to do with the in-balance of serotonin in our brain. And so, it is more than just feeling low for a few days somebody with depression will feel consistently low to varying degrees for weeks or months. The good news is though that with the right help you can make a full recovery.

Symptoms of depression can range from lasting feelings of unhappiness and hopelessness, a loss of interest in things you used to enjoy and to the other extreme feeling suicidal, where you feel that your life is no longer worth living.

Doctors gauge depression as being mild, moderate, or severe.

**Mild:** will have some impact on our life

**Moderate:** will have a significant impact on our life

**Severe:** as having a huge impact on our life.

Depression can come on gradually and so it can often be difficult to notice that there is anything wrong, and it can often be a friend or family member who will spot the signs before we do.

**Symptoms:**

These are generally complex and will vary widely from person to person; so, what are the symptoms? Well, these would normally be some but not all the following:

* Avoiding contact with friends and family and taking part in fewer social activities,
* Neglecting hobbies and interests,
* Having general difficulties, a home, work, or family.

The psychological symptoms will normally include some though not always all the following:

* Continuous low mood or a general feeling of sadness,
* Feeling of helpless and hopeless,
* A feeling of low self esteem,
* Feeling tearful,
* A sense of guilt,
* Irritable,
* No interest or motivation,
* A difficulty to make decisions,
* A lack of enjoyment in life,
* Being worried or anxious,
* Suicidal thoughts or wanting to harm yourself.

Along with the psychological feelings there will be physical symptoms as well, and again these will generally include some but, not usually all the following:

* A slowness in speech or movement,
* Generally, a loss of appetite, or but less commonly an increase in appetite,
* Constipation,
* Unexplainable aches and pains,
* No energy,
* Lack of libido,
* Menstrual cycle can be affected,
* Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much.

So when should you **seek help**, it is suggested that if your symptoms last **more than a fortnight** then you should go to see you GP, they will ask lots of questions so that they can give the right advice, generally the GP will not do anything on the initial visit but will suggest follow up visit to assess how things are so that they can be certain of the right course of treatment The **treatment varies from person to person** sometimes it will be arranging time to talk therapy and other times it will be prescribing medication. There are several classes of drugs available, the selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors or SSRI’s, and the serotonin no-epinephrine reuptake inhibitors SNRI’s for short. All medication carries benefits but risks also so the type you are prescribed will be determined by the severity of your symptoms

There are also Anti-anxiety drugs available, however these drugs may reduce anxiety but will be much use for depression and because of a risk of addiction they can only be used over a short period of time.

* Allow yourself to feel and know that It’s **not your fault** – depression and anxiety are medical conditions.
* Do something however small like make a cup of tea.
* Make a routine because that creates a structure which can help with depression/anxiety.
* Try and stick to a bedtime routine.
* Try to eat something nutritious.
* If you feel able try and go for a walk because exercise releases the feel-good endorphins.
* Do something you enjoy like watch TV.
* **Contact someone you can trust.**

**Anxiety**

It’s **perfectly natural to feel anxious** we might feel nervous about a forthcoming exam or starting a new job, in fact we have inside ourselves the same fight or flight mechanism that animals have. So, there are times when it’s perfectly natural to feel anxious in fact it’s healthy. But some people find it very hard to control their anxiety their feelings of anxiousness will be almost constant and as such will affect their whole life.

Anxiety is the main symptom of several conditions including panic disorder, phobias, agoraphobia, claustrophobia, post traumatic stress disorder and social anxiety phobia (social phobia). What I’m going to concentrate on is a condition called Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD).

This condition makes the sufferer feel anxious about anything and everything, as soon as one thing is solved then another anxiety takes it place and they can’t remember the last time they felt relaxed.

A person with GAD will suffer psychological, and physical symptoms which varies from person to person, but can include

* Feeling restless or worried
* Having difficulty concentrating or sleeping
* Dizziness or heart palpitations

**What causes GAD?**
Nobody really knows the exact cause, although experts believe that it’s likely to e a combination of factors, and these may include:

* An over-activity in areas of the brain involved in emotions and behaviour
* An imbalance of the brain chemicals serotonin and noradrenaline, which control and regulate mood.
* Genes we can inherit from our parents, it’s believed that we are five times more likely to develop GAD if we have a close relative with the condition.
* If there is history of stressful or traumatic i.e domestic violence, child abuser bullying.
* Having a painful long-term health problem, for instance arthritis.
* History of drug or alcohol misuse.

But equally many people can develop GAD for no apparent reason. It’s estimated that up to 5% of the UK population are affected, and of these slightly more women than men suffer, and it’s more common in people between 35 and 39.

How is GAD treated?

CBT is available on the NHS or there is private psychotherapy. Medication can be useful in the way of an antidepressant called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors SSRI’s.

There are things we can do ourselves to help to reduce our anxiety, such as:

* Do a self-help group i.e. mindfulness.
* Taking regular exercise.
* Quitting smoking.
* Cutting down on alcohol and caffeine consumption.
* Do something you enjoy.
* Have regular meals.

**Above all it’s important to know that there is help there, and that you don’t have to be alone.**