



WHEN YOU'RE FEELING LOW...

Stress, depression and anxiety are a part of modern day life. Perhaps you feel down or sad, or maybe you aren't coping with your workload but aren't exactly sure why you feel the way you do. Mental health conditions can affect people from all walks of life, races, ages and genders. In most cases conditions can be treated, but few people actually seek treatment, fearing the stigma associated with these conditions.

What is stress?

Some stress is good for you. It motivates you to get up in the morning and face your tasks for the day. It can help you to achieve your goals. Prolonged negative stress however, is bad stress that can cause physical and mental problems over time.

Stress causes a reaction in the body. Stress hormones are released into the blood to produce certain responses. If your life is in danger, they help to get blood quickly to the muscles so that you can run away or fight. Once the danger is past, the levels taper off. In the case of prolonged negative stress, the brain keeps recognising situations as 'stress situations' and the levels of these stress hormones remain high. Over time, this constant flow of hormones in the system can lead to a number of health issues. People experience stress differently. One situation may be stressful for one person but not for another. We all cope differently with stress.

Chronic stress symptoms:

- › tension headaches
- › neck and shoulder pain
- › mood changes
- › sleep changes
- › gastrointestinal problems
- › obesity
- › low libido
- › heart disease
- › diabetes
- › anxiety and/or depression
- › substance abuse (trying to cope)
- › Alzheimer's disease (later years)

What is depression?

Most of us have experienced a time of low mood when things just

seemed to be going wrong and we struggled to cope. Depression surpasses this period and begins to affect one's quality of life. The World Health Organisation says that depression is a leading cause of ill health and disability throughout the world. Over 300 million people are living with depression – an 18% increase between the years 2005 and 2015. A doctor may diagnose depression as mild, moderate or severe. There are different types of depression - see the block 'Types of depression' for more information.

Symptoms of depression

People experience the symptoms of depression in different ways, so not everyone will have all these symptoms.

Common symptoms include:

- › feelings of sadness
- › negative thoughts
- › difficulty concentrating
- › difficulty making decisions
- › poor memory
- › avoiding things you once enjoyed
- › withdrawing from loved ones
- › sleep changes and disturbances
- › lack of energy
- › feelings of hopelessness
- › inability to complete daily tasks
- › reckless behaviour (drinking, gambling etc.)
- › thoughts of suicide
- › changes in eating habits (more or less)

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a term used to describe those disorders that cause persistent worry, fear and apprehension and may lead to

panic attacks with severe physical symptoms. Thoughts and situations may trigger anxiety which could lead to a panic attack – a quick, overwhelming fear that causes a racing heart, chest pain, excessive sweating, dizziness and nausea. Anxiety disorders include generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder and phobias.

Feelings and symptoms

- › constant fear that something bad will happen
- › inability to try new things
- › sleep disturbances
- › persistent worry
- › panic attacks – rapid heartbeat/breathing
- › sweating
- › headaches
- › neck and shoulder pain



Self-help for stress, depression and anxiety

- › Identify those areas of your life that cause you the most stress. What can you change? For example, if you are struggling to juggle work and family, can you hire a helper at home?
- › Look at your lifestyle. Are you eating a healthy diet? Some changes to your diet can help to improve your health and help your body cope better with stress.
- › Get more exercise. Find ways to build exercise into your day. Numerous studies have revealed that physical exercise can help to decrease tension in the body, improve mood and even help you sleep better.
- › Take time off. If you are working around the clock, chances are good that you are struggling with stress. Taking time off can help to recharge your batteries and to decrease stress levels.
- › Find ways to relax – both daily and weekly. Find something you enjoy – read a book, watch a movie, meditate or take a walk in nature.
- › Reconnect with family and friends. Open up to a loved one about your feelings. Talking about a situation can help you to feel better and your loved one can give you a different perspective on the situation.
- › If you don't have family living close to you, consider taking up a hobby or sport where you can meet new people.
- › If you are struggling with anxiety about a particular issue, acknowledge it and ask yourself how the situation can change? Consider counselling or coaching to help you find ways to overcome and manage the situation.

When to seek help

If you are unable to cope, despite trying a number of self-help techniques, or you are abusing alcohol, prescription medication or illicit drugs, you must consider professional help. In most cases, depression and anxiety can be successfully treated. The first step is acknowledging that you have a problem and that you need help. Depending on your diagnosis, treatment may include psychotherapy, medication or a combination of both. Contact your employee wellbeing programme for support and telecounselling and possible referral for face-to-face counselling.



Resources:

www.themighty.com
www.who.int
www.webMD.com
www.healthline.com
www.themuse.com



COPING AT WORK

Some ways to cope with depression and anxiety at work:

- › If you are not coping at work, seek professional treatment as your productivity at work can be seriously affected. Start and follow the treatments your healthcare practitioner prescribes.
- › Tell someone. Open up to your direct superior or someone in the HR department. If you feel that you can't, or that you are not ready to share, that's okay too. Even a confidant, a colleague you trust implicitly, can help to be a sounding board when you need one.
- › Depression and anxiety can hamper your ability to concentrate and to retain information. Make notes, set yourself goals and give yourself time to complete projects.
- › Try to avoid stressful situations by pre-planning and managing your time. Keep your workspace tidy by doing regular admin work. If you don't have a good system, try to establish one so you can stay on top of your tasks.
- › Take regular breaks throughout the workday to keep you fresh and focused. Take your annual leave when it's due.
- › Pack healthy meals to enjoy at work. Keep hydrated throughout the day.
- › If your workload is already full, don't offer to take on additional tasks. Learn to say no.

Source: www.adaa.org

TYPES OF DEPRESSION

- › **Major depression** – feelings of sadness/ depression most days of the week
- › **Psychotic depression** – depression with hallucinations, paranoia and delusion
- › **Persistent depression disorder** – prolonged depression (two years plus)
- › **Seasonal affective disorder** - major depression at the change of season, particularly at the onset of winter
- › **Bipolar disorder** – manic depression (periods of high or low mood)
- › **Premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD)** – depression before the start of the menstrual cycle
- › **Situational depression** – depression following a life-changing or difficult time in your life
- › **Atypical depression** – positive events temporarily improve depressed mood
- › **Postpartum depression** – after the birth of a baby

Source: WebMD.com

THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

If you feel that you are going to harm yourself, contact the Suicide Crisis Line on **0800 567567** or send an SMS to **31393**, or you can contact the South African Depression and Anxiety Support Group (SADAG) Mental Health Line on **011 234 4837**.