



LIFE MENTAL HEALTH

DEPRESSION & ANXIETY INFORMATION GUIDE

Depression & Anxiety – Information Guide

- What is depression?
- Signs of depression
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- What is anxiety?
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DEPRESSION

Many South Africans of all races, sexes and cultures can suffer from depression and anxiety. So if you are one of those people, you are not alone and there is help for you.

Did you know that most people who are depressed don't get treatment?

1 in 10 people will have depression in their life, but most people do not get the help they need, even though treatment can help. People often don't seek help because:

- depression is often not seen as a real illness;
- many people blame themselves and think they are weak; and
- people are scared or too embarrassed to ask for help.

What is depression?

Depression is an illness, that involves your body, mood and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself, and the way you think about things and the world. Depression is not the same as everyday blues, grief or sadness that we all sometimes feel. It is not a sign of weakness, and it cannot be wished away. People with depression cannot just “pull themselves together” and get better. Without treatment, symptoms can last for weeks, months or years.

Types of depression

A person with *major depression* feels very sad and down most of the time, and this affects their work, sleeping, and how much or little they eat, and how little they now enjoy things they used to enjoy, like sports, TV, music, church and community events. (See symptom list)

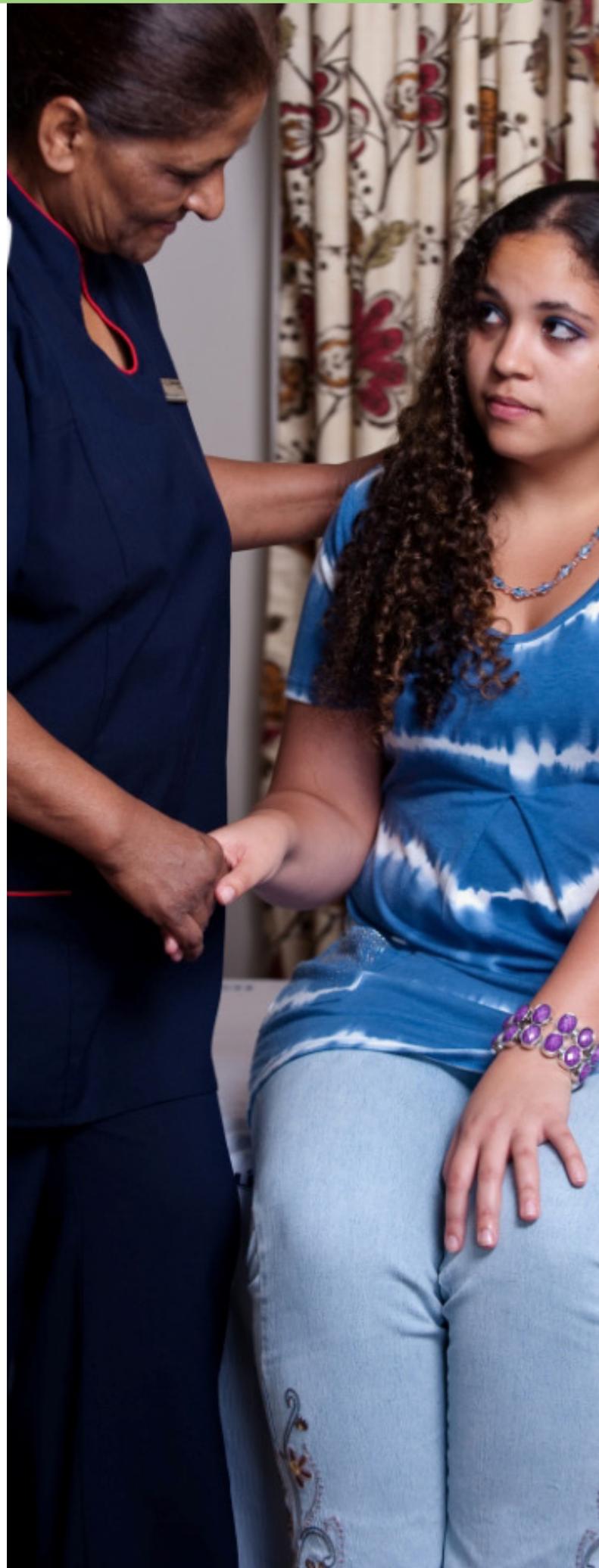
When their down mood is swapped with very high or overly excited or manic feelings and behaviour, this is called *bipolar disorder* (which used to be called manic depression).

Symptoms

Not everyone who is depressed or who has bipolar disorder will have every symptom. Some people may have only a few symptoms, whereas others will have many.

Depression symptoms:

- feeling sad or feeling “empty” most of the time. Feeling anxious or hopeless about life. Feeling guilty, or feeling helpless;
- thoughts of death or suicide, suicide attempts, fear of dying;
- restlessness, irritability, or anger;
- difficulty concentrating, remembering things or making decisions;
- loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities that were once enjoyed;
- less energy than usual, tired all the time, being “slowed down”;



- losing weight by not eating or gaining weight by over eating;
- early-morning awakening, or oversleeping; or
- physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, stomach pain, back or chest pain, even if they have been checked by a doctor.

Bipolar symptoms:

- excited or fast thinking and talking;
- irritable, angry and cross mood or extreme anger;
- feelings of power, greatness, or more importance than other people you know;
- thinking very fast and talking so fast that others cannot understand you;
- foolish spending of money you don't have;
- delusions, believing things that are not true may happen;
- extreme cases of hearing or seeing things that aren't there reckless behaviour with no thought of what will happen;
- sexual activity without condoms;
- abuse of alcohol or drugs; or
- little need for sleep

Please see the "Bipolar Disorders" leaflet for additional information.

Causes of depression

Depression has many possible causes and is often brought on by a mixture of different factors. Sometimes a specific event may lead to depression; other times depression comes on for no apparent reason that you can see – even for people whose lives are going well. Some possible reasons include:

- **External events:** the break-up of a relationship, a traumatic event, financial worries, loneliness, legal problems, retirement, and grief can all result in depression.
- **Family History:** Having close family who have had depression sometimes means you are more likely to have depression as well.

Depression is also believed to be caused by an imbalance of brain chemicals. Medical illness, including strokes, HIV and AIDS, TB and other health problems, can also cause depression. Some medications like treatment for high blood pressure, birth control pills, and steroids may also increase your risk.

Treatments

Depression is one of the most treatable mental illnesses and eight out of ten people get totally better. You will need to have a complete medical check up to make sure there are no other medical causes for how you are feeling.

Anti-depressants

Eight out of ten of people with depression will make a good recovery on anti-depressants. If one medicine does not work for you, try another one. Anti-depressants do not work quickly – for most people it takes 2-3 weeks to start feeling better. It is very important not to stop taking the pills and to give them a full chance of working. They may cause mild side effects like a dry mouth, sickness, headache, or dizziness but these usually pass in a week or two. Never mix medications of any kind – prescription ones from the hospital, or pharmacy with over the counter medication – you must consult your doctor first. Always tell your doctor if you are pregnant or have any other illness – like HIV and AIDS. Call your doctor or speak to a pharmacist if you have a question about any medicine.

Psychotherapy or talk therapy

Psychotherapy (or talk therapy) with a psychologist, social worker, or counsellor gives people the skills to cope with their

illness and the stress it causes.

Support groups

Support groups are a very good way to get support and advice from people who know how you feel because they have felt the same way themselves. Support groups are run by patients for other patients as a safe place where you can share experiences and help. Call SADAG 0800 20 51 21 for contacts in your area or speak to the Life Mental Health unit closest to you.

Self help

Self help can help you cope better.

Here are some things you can do:

- Understand what depression is – the more you know, the better you will cope.
- Do things to keep yourself busy – it can be of great help if your mind can be occupied by an interest or hobby, or by reading a book or watching a TV programme or film.
- Avoid substances like smoking, drugs and alcohol.
- Try to be with other people and to talk about how you feel; it is usually better than being alone and secretive. See people, do things that may make you feel better: like going to a movie, watching a sports match, or having tea with a friend.
- Let your family and friends help you. Don't be afraid to ask for help if you need it. Expect your mood to improve slowly. Feeling better takes time.
- Remember: depression is not part of you, it is caused by symptoms. These symptoms cause you to feel, think and act differently to normal. Once depression goes, things will be different.

ANXIETY

We all know what it feels like to be nervous and anxious – the butterflies in the stomach feeling before a date, the tension when your boss is angry, and the way your heart beats fast and hard when you get a fright or are in danger. Anxiety can help us cope but for people with an anxiety illness, this emotion can be disabling if it is there all the time.

Panic disorder

Panic attacks involve short periods of terrifying fear, along with many physical symptoms: your heart may pound, you may feel dizzy, sick, out of breath and scared. Your fingers or legs may tingle or you may experience pain in your chest.

Please see the "Bipolar Disorders" leaflet for additional information.

These can happen often and unexpectedly when there is no reason for the fear and panic. Most people with panic disorder feel scared about having another panic attack and avoid places in which they believe these attacks are likely to occur again. Treatment can help most people who have this illness. It is very important for the person who has panic disorder to get information about the problem, and the type of treatments that are able to help them.

Who suffers from panic disorder?

The disorder typically begins in young adulthood, but older people and children can be affected. Women are ill with it, twice as often as men. The disorder can also be passed down if another family member had or has it.

Symptoms

In the beginning, the first panic attack seems to come from no



where while a person is doing some everyday activity like driving, sitting at work, or shopping. Suddenly, the person feels very frightened and terrified. This usually lasts only a few minutes, but may feel longer. The symptoms do disappear over an hour or so. People who have had a panic attack feel like they have been hit by some terrible illness or feel that they are “going crazy”. Often people who are having a panic attack go to a hospital for help, suspecting it is a heart attack. The first panic attacks may occur when a person is under a lot of stress for example, from a lot of work or exams, or from the death of a family member or close friend. The attacks may also occur following surgery, a serious accident, illness or childbirth. Too much caffeine and the use of drugs or some medicines can also cause panic attacks.

Panic attack symptoms:

- sense of being very scared, frightened or terrorised;
- rapid and noisy heartbeat;
- difficulty breathing and or chest pains;
- dizziness, light-headedness, feeling sick;
- tingling or no feeling in the hands;
- hot flushes or shivering;
- sense of not being right, fear of losing control, going “crazy” or doing something embarrassing; or a fear of dying.

Coping with panic attacks

- Remember that although your feelings and symptoms are very frightening, they are not dangerous or harmful. Understand that what you are feeling is only a very strong feeling of your body’s normal behaviour to stress.
- Do not fight your feelings or try to wish them away.
- The more you are willing to deal with them, the less frightening they will become.
- Remain concentrating on the present, where you are and who is with you and knowing that you are fine. Do not worry about what may happen to you. Get help and read about your illness.
- Focus on, and carry out a simple and easy things, talk to a friend on the phone, go to the shops, talk to a neighbour or office worker, concentrate on counting backwards from 100 in 2’s or snapping a rubber band on your wrist to bring you back to the present.

Treatment

Get help and therapy at the unit closest to you (see details at the back of this brochure).

Should you have any queries regarding depression and anxiety, contact SADAG or your nearest unit.



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Please note that this information is by no means meant to replace therapy or treatment. Please contact your nearest unit for further assistance