

How Normal Anxiety, Depression & Stress Can Develop into a Problem

A brief overview

Anxiety, depression and stress are often normal reactions to many different circumstances. For example, we can become stressed or anxious when we take an exam or go for a job interview, speak in public or face hostility or criticism from someone else. Low mood or a period of depression or deep sadness can occur when we suffer a loss, such as a broken relationship, the death of a loved one, or being made redundant.

There are many different reasons why anxiety, depression or stress develops into a problem, and these vary from person to person. Everybody copes with anxiety, depression and stress differently and some people can cope with anxious, depressing or stressful circumstances more effectively, often depending on how they have coped in the past. Examples of common reasons leading to increased anxiety or depression are included below – you may be able to think of additional ones.

Increased anxiety, depression or stress can develop:

- After a long or intense period of stress and worry.
- As a result of unpleasant or stressful life events. These may include the death of a loved one, serious illness (yours or someone close to you), the break up of a relationship, or losing or changing jobs.
- Due to the experiences we have had in our lives and how we have learned to cope with them, this will influence which situations we find stressful and how we deal with them now.
- Because of persistent or habitual unhelpful / negative / self-critical thinking, such as “I can’t do this”, “I can’t cope”, “I am useless / a failure”, “I always mess things up”
- When you lack self-confidence and self-esteem
- After being involved in an incident that you experienced as threatening. This may result in feeling anxious the next time you are in similar circumstances - for example following a car accident, you may feel anxious when driving.

How does anxiety, depression or stress then become a problem?

- When it lasts a long time, or keeps returning.
- When we experience panic attacks. If you think you may experience panic attacks, discuss it with your guide.
- When you begin to avoid doing things or going certain places because of your anxiety or depression.
- When it interferes with your life in other ways such as sleeping, eating or sexual activity.
- When you begin to worry that the symptoms are due to a serious health problem or start to think that you will never recover.
- When you drink too much or keep taking drugs to deal with your symptoms.
- When it affects your relationships, for example you may become irritable or withdrawn.
- When it affects your work, hobbies or social life and leads to you avoiding other people or withdrawing from relationships or activities that you normally enjoy.
- When you start hurting yourself in some way, such as cutting yourself. You may even become so hopeless that you think about ending your life.

If you are affected by one or more of these symptoms, discuss it with your GP or health professional - you may need more than just self-help leaflets.

