

THE DEPRESSION / ANXIETY CONNECTION



Depression and anxiety have more of a connection than you might realize. More than half of the people diagnosed with depression also have anxiety. Individually, either condition can be disabling. However, depression and anxiety combined can be especially difficult to live with, to diagnose, and to treat. Depression can make people feel discouraged, helpless, and hopeless. Anxiety can make them agitated and overwhelmed by physical symptoms; a pounding heart, tightness in the chest, and difficulty breathing.

People diagnosed with both depression and anxiety seem to have more severe symptoms, more impairment in their day-to-day lives, more trouble finding the right treatment, and do have a higher risk of suicide.

If you are depressed, you may not know the reason and many times depression has more than one cause. Depression can be a combination of **genetics** to include biology (chemicals in the brain), **gender** (women affected more than men), **age** (elderly living alone); **past events/experiences** to include trauma and grief (violence or death); **your present circumstances** to include changes and stressful events (divorce, caregiver responsibilities, getting married, new job); **health conditions** (cancer, heart disease, chronic pain, thyroid problems); and **medications** to include substances (prescription drugs, alcohol or substance abuse).

Signs/symptoms of depression include:

- **Sleep Problems** - Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.
- **Chest Pain** - Sometimes chest pains can be a sign of depression. Depression can increase your risk of heart disease.
- **Fatigue/Exhaustion** - Depression and fatigue together tend to make both conditions seem worse.
- **Muscle Aches/Joint Pain** - Pain and depression are closely linked - the two conditions share chemical messengers in the brain.
- **Digestive Problems** - Our brains and digestive systems are strongly connected- many people get stomach aches or nausea when stressed or worried. Depression can cause symptoms of nausea, indigestion, diarrhea, or constipation.
- **Headaches/Migraines**- People with depression often complain of chronic headaches/more migraines.
- **Changes in Appetite/Weight** - Some people have a loss of appetite when they feel depressed, while others eat. Depression has been linked to eating disorders like bulimia, anorexia, or binge eating.
- **Back Pain** - People who are depressed may be four times more likely to develop chronic or disabling neck or back pain.

- **Agitation/Restlessness-** Irritability and restlessness may be related to sleep problems or another sign of depression. Depression increases the risk of alcohol or other substance abuse which also can contribute to irritability and restlessness.

Tips for Depression and Anxiety Treatment:

Gaining control might take more intensive treatment and closer monitoring by your health care providers.

- **Give medicine time to work.** Many antidepressants also help with anxiety. You might need other medicines as well. It could take time for the drugs to work and time for your doctor to find the ideal medicines for you.
- **Put effort into therapy.** Cognitive behavioral therapy has the best evidence for treating anxiety and depression. It helps people identify and then change the thought and behavior patterns that add to their distress. However, you must be committed and put the effort into therapy.
- **Make some lifestyle changes.** Breathing exercises, muscle relaxation, and yoga can be beneficial. Of course, eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising should be integrated into your lifestyle changes. Developing better habits in your life is something that you can work on with your therapist.
- **Get a second opinion.** When they are combined, depression and anxiety can be hard to diagnose. If you have any doubts about your care, get a second opinion.
- **Focus on small steps.** Take “baby” steps and over time small changes can give you the confidence to make bigger ones.
- **Be an active partner in your treatment.** The key to success is having a solid working relationship with your healthcare providers. This may include your PCP, psychiatrist, psychologist, counselor or social worker, or a combination thereof, but you need to trust one another and work as a team.

“The most important thing to remember is that depression is not your fault. It's not a flaw in your character. It's a disease that can affect anyone -- and regardless of the cause, there are many good ways to treat it.” WebMD

Visit the [Lehigh County intranet site](#) to schedule your appointment at the Wellness Centre.