

Treatments for anxiety and depression

Treatments

There are many approaches to treating depression and anxiety. This will depend on the kinds of symptoms the person is experiencing, how the symptoms impact the person, and how long they have been experiencing them for. Often anxiety and depression can be treated in similar ways. This can include talking therapies, medication and alternative treatments. Often people will try a combination of treatments, for example talking therapy and medication at the same time.

When to get help

It is important to know that you do not need to wait until distress is moderate or severe to take action. People should seek help as soon as possible. When a person's symptoms are mild, this can actually be an ideal time to focus on treatment. Getting help before feelings become too overwhelming may mean that it's easier to seek help and easier to remain in treatment.

Talking therapies

Talking therapies are used by psychologists and psychiatrists. This kind of therapy can help someone recover from anxiety and depression and can also help to prevent it from happening again in future. Talking therapies are useful for mild, moderate or severe anxiety and depression.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

- CBT is one of the most effective talking therapies.
- It recognises that the way people think affects the way they feel.
- It teaches people to think rationally about common difficulties, helping a person to change their thought patterns and the way they react to certain situations.
- More details about CBT is provided in Module 4.

Behaviour therapy

- Behaviour therapy encourages activities that are enjoyable in order to reduce patterns of worry.
- It also involves elements of 'exposure therapy' to help people face their fears rather than avoiding them.
- It does not try to change beliefs and attitudes like in CBT.

Mindfulness based therapies

- Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) is a group therapy that can effectively treat recurrent major depressive disorder. It uses activities such as 'mindful meditation' that helps you focus on the feelings and sensations you have in the present moment, without judgement or trying to change them.
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is a group therapy used for a broader range of both physical and mental health conditions, including Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD). It uses the same principles as MBCT but explores a variety of stresses and is therefore more widely applicable.

Family therapy

- Family therapy involves the person with anxiety or depression, and their family.

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- It focuses on how the person's issues impact the relationships within the family.
- It aims to improve communication between family members.
- It can be helpful for many different issues or circumstances (e.g. substance use disorders).

Psychodynamic psychotherapy

- This form of therapy is usually long-term and looks at how past experiences affect people.
- It focuses on the way childhood and earlier life experiences affect how the person thinks and acts now.
- It has been found to be particularly helpful in treatment and management of GAD and phobias, particularly those first experienced in childhood.

Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)

- This is a variation of psychodynamic therapy.
- IPT helps people find new ways to get along with others.
- The therapy involves the exploration of four main problems - grief, role disputes (relationship struggle), role transitions (change in life circumstances such as becoming homeless or unemployed) and interpersonal deficits (when the other three areas are not relevant).

e-therapies

- e-therapies are ones that are delivered online.
- They often follow the same basic elements as other therapies (e.g. CBT) but you can work through the program in your own time.
- You have the convenience of being able to access therapy from home or in rural and remote areas.
- Some programs are completely self-guided, others provide access to a health professional to help you through the program.

Medication

Medication might be used when the anxiety and/or depression:

- is severe
- lasts a long time
- is associated with a high risk of self-harm
- has failed to respond to talking therapies.

Medication is often used alongside talking therapies.

Alternative treatments

There is good evidence to support the use of some alternative treatments, particularly for mild depression and anxiety or when combined with other treatment approaches (talking therapies or medication).

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Alternative treatments include:

- exercise and yoga
- self-help books involving CBT
- massage
- meditation
- pet therapy, art therapy or music therapy.

In summary

There are many, many different treatments for anxiety and depression, and different things might work best for different people. Treatments might work better at different times in their recovery journey, or in different combinations. Everyone's treatment plan looks different.