

Anxiety and Depression

“Patients who are anxious feel very wound up. Patients who report feeling depressed feel like just weighted down.”

Molly Hass know those conflicting feelings all too well. She has Social Anxiety Disorder, a fear of interacting with other people. At the same time, she has bouts of extreme sadness or depression.

“I think part of the reason it's just you feel bad all the time and so it's kind of like similar to having a health, a chronic health disorder or a physical health disorder that it just, it kind of makes you feel hopeless if you don't know what to do with it and it's left untreated.”

That one-two punch of anxiety and depression is actually quite common. Some estimates show that nearly two-thirds of people who suffer from one of these mental health conditions will also show signs of the other.

“They kind of feed off each other in some ways.”

Sarah Reed is a mental health counselor who also suffers from several anxiety disorders.

“Anxiety always pulls me towards the future and makes me think the worst and depression entraps me in the past and makes me look at even the best things with a dark lens. And so in the here and now, it can almost feel like an imprisonment.”

People with a depressive disorder often have trouble doing normal daily activities. Some may feel as if life isn't worth living. While irritability, sleep issues and trouble concentrating can point to depression, they also can be signs of anxiety. There are other symptoms that are specific to anxiety.

“It's associated with a lot of physical symptoms: an increase in heart rate, chest tightness, muscle tension, shaking, these kinds of things.”

“Anxiety is different from depression and is treated slightly differently. They tend to run together. People with depression tend to have some anxiety. And if you are very anxious, you tend to feel depressed. Fortunately, many of the medications that we use are successful both for anxiety and depression.”

Anti-depressant medications are often used together with Psychotherapy, or Talk Therapy, to treat both anxiety and depression. That's made all the difference for Claudine Jackson, who lives with several anxiety disorders, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

“The treatment that worked for me is to have a psychiatrist to get me, get my mood and my anxiety regulated because I was losing a lot of sleep. And I was falling into a deep depression.”

Therapy also taught Claudine not to isolate herself.

“I talk to people now. I'm not afraid to talk about mental illness and that I suffer from mental illness. Not talking about it was making me sicker.”

Sarah has discovered her own set of “tools” to help her cope when her anxiety and depression get worse with the onset of cold weather.

Anxiety and Depression

“I, every fall, would try something new to try to lessen my symptoms. And so, one year that looked like sitting in front of a seasonal affective disorder light, for an hour every day. Another year, I started mixed martial arts and did that for eight years. Another year, I started eating foods that were supposedly like higher in serotonin or would increase your serotonin levels.”

Other lifestyle changes that can help include: Regular sleep habits, exercise, avoiding alcohol, smoking and recreational drugs, and using stress-reduction techniques.

“Sometimes it can be easy especially if I'm starting to feel depressive symptoms to kind of just get stuck in that. So, I have things that I can do whether that's like playing the piano, like baking. I also like to color. That's very relaxing for me. I'm just doing things right away that kind of help bring me out of it.”

Anxiety disorders and depressive disorder don't usually go away on their own. It's important to talk to a mental health professional to find the best treatment plan that will work for you.