

## Arthritis and emotions

*beyondblue* and Arthritis Australia have developed this information sheet to raise awareness of the risks and impact of depression and anxiety in people with arthritis. This sheet provides general information about the symptoms of depression and anxiety and what you can do to manage them.

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. Anxious feelings are a normal reaction to a situation where a person feels under pressure and usually pass once the stressful situation has passed, or 'stressor' is removed. However, for some people these anxious feelings happen for no apparent reason or continue after the stressful event has passed. For a person experiencing anxiety, anxious feelings cannot be brought under control easily. Anxiety is common, but effective treatments are available. The sooner a person gets help, the sooner they can recover.

### Signs of anxiety

The symptoms of anxiety can often develop gradually over time. There are many types of anxiety and there are a range of symptoms for each. Anxiety can be expressed in different ways such as uncontrollable worry, intense fear (phobias or panic attacks), upsetting dreams or flashbacks of a traumatic event.

Some common symptoms of anxiety include:

- hot and cold flushes
- racing heart
- tightening of the chest
- snowballing worries
- obsessive thinking and compulsive behaviour.

### What is depression?

While we all feel sad, moody or low from time to time, some people experience these feelings intensely, for long periods of time (weeks, months or even years) and sometimes without any apparent reason. Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious condition that has an impact on both physical and mental health. The good news is that depression is treatable and effective treatments are available.

### Signs of depression

A person may be depressed if he or she has felt sad, down or miserable most of the time **for more than two weeks** and/or has lost interest or pleasure in usual activities, and has also experienced some of the signs and symptoms on the list below. Note, the symptoms will not provide a diagnosis – for that you need to see a health professional – but they can be used as a guide.

Some common symptoms of depression include:

- not going out anymore, loss of interest in enjoyable activities
- withdrawing from close family and friends
- being unable to concentrate and not getting things done at work or school
- feeling overwhelmed, indecisive and lacking in confidence
- increased alcohol and drug use
- loss or change of appetite and significant weight loss or gain
- trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep and being tired during the day
- feeling worthless, helpless and guilty
- increased irritability, frustration and moodiness
- thoughts such as, "I'm a failure", "Life's not worth living", "People would be better off without me".

### What are the links between depression, anxiety and arthritis?

Up to two thirds of people with arthritis say their condition has affected them emotionally. People living with persistent pain are four times more likely to experience depression or anxiety than people living without pain.

Many people with arthritis are anxious about the impact arthritis might have on their everyday life and their future. Having arthritis can result in a loss of independence, self esteem, the ability to work and continue social or recreational activities. These losses are risk factors for experiencing depression and anxiety.

Living with arthritis can place stress on relationships. Pain and tiredness may make connecting with family members and friends seem like an effort. Intimate relationships can also be affected.

It is not unusual for younger people to feel especially angry, depressed or anxious at being diagnosed with a disease that is mistakenly thought to affect only 'old' people.

Depression and anxiety can make it hard for people to manage their arthritis effectively if they can't find the energy to exercise, take medication regularly, keep appointments and eat healthily.

## What treatments are there for depression, anxiety and arthritis?

There are effective treatments for depression, anxiety and arthritis. A co-ordinated approach to treatment can have benefits for all conditions. For example, people

Depression, anxiety and arthritis are common and treatable. Seek help early – the sooner the better.

This sheet was produced in association with *beyondblue*

with arthritis and mild depression or anxiety may find that regular physical activity improves their mental health and also helps control joint pain and stiffness. More severe types of depression or anxiety may require different types of treatment, such as psychological therapies. For more information on treatments for anxiety and depression visit the *beyondblue* website [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

## What can you do to help yourself?

If you think you might have depression or anxiety:

- seek help as early as possible from a doctor or other health professional (for example, psychiatrist or psychologist)
- get involved in social activities
- exercise regularly
- learn about depression, anxiety and arthritis
- eat a healthy, balanced diet
- achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- limit alcohol intake
- get help and support from family and friends.

CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ARTHRITIS OFFICE FOR MORE INFORMATION SHEETS ON ARTHRITIS.



## For more information:

*beyondblue*: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) Learn more about depression and anxiety, or get support by calling 1300 22 4636 or chatting online at [www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)

SANE Australia: information about mental health and where to go for support. 1800 187 263 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

Lifeline: 24 hour counselling, information and referral. 13 11 14 (local call cost). [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

Mensline Australia: 24 hour telephone support, information and referral for men. 1300 789 978 [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

CRUFAD (Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression): information about depression, anxiety and its management. [www.crufad.org](http://www.crufad.org)

To find a psychologist, talk to your doctor, contact the Australian Psychological Society on 1800 333 497 or visit [www.psychology.org.au](http://www.psychology.org.au)

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Your local Arthritis Office has information, education and support for people with arthritis  
**Helpline 1800 011 041 [www.arthritisaustralia.com.au](http://www.arthritisaustralia.com.au)**

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