

# *YOUR HEALTH*

Newsletter February 2021



Duradiamond  
Building Healthy Business



New!  
QR codes

- **MENTAL HEALTH - ANXIETY**
- **TINNITUS**
- **SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER**

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## Anxiety can affect anyone

Anxiety can affect any of us, in different ways and at different times. Anxiety is the mind and is the body's reaction to stressful, dangerous, or unfamiliar situations.

It's normal to feel anxious about moving to a new place, starting a new job, or taking a test.

Anxiety stops when you get used to the situation, when the situation changes, or if you just leave. It is important to realise that anxiety is normal and is part of your body's protective system. Ordinary anxiety is a feeling that comes and goes but does not interfere with your everyday life.

**Anxiety symptoms:** your brain responds to a threat or danger by releasing stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. Even if the danger is not real, these hormones cause the physical symptoms of anxiety. Once the threatening situation has stopped, your body will usually return to normal.



**Mental symptoms** of anxiety include changes in thoughts and behaviour, for example:

- Restlessness
- A feeling of apprehension or dread
- A feeling of being "on-edge"
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritability.

**Physical symptoms** of anxiety can include:

- Sweating
- Heavy and fast breathing
- Heart palpitations
- Hot flushes or blushing
- Dry mouth
- Shaking
- Hair loss
- Fast heartbeat
- Extreme tiredness or lack of energy
- Dizziness and fainting
- Stomach aches and sickness.

**Anxiety disorders:** these occur when our fears and perceptions of danger are greater than they need to be, which can impact on our quality of life or limit opportunities. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The symptoms can be intense and can interfere with daily activities such as job performance and relationships.

Anxiety changes the way you think, your perception and awareness, so that you notice physical sensations that someone without anxiety would never notice.

Anxiety can even amplify physical sensations, e.g. someone without anxiety may have a knee pain so mild that they don't even notice it, but a person with anxiety feels that knee pain severely, because their mind has been altered to be hypersensitive to the way the body feels. Anxiety can also create symptoms that are not there at all.

**Examples of anxiety disorders** include generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder (social phobia), specific phobias and separation anxiety disorder. You can have more than one anxiety disorder. Sometimes anxiety results from a medical condition that needs treatment. Whatever form of anxiety you have, treatment can help.

### Helping yourself:

- **Talk about it.** This can help when anxiety comes from recent setbacks, like a relationship breakdown or losing a job. Try talking to a friend or relative who you trust and respect and who is a good listener. They may have had the same problem themselves or know someone else who has.
- **Self-help groups.** These are a good way of getting in touch with people who have similar problems. They can understand what you are going through. As well as having the chance to talk, you may be able to find out how other people have coped. Some of these groups are specifically about anxieties and phobias. Others may be for people who have been through similar experiences, e.g. women's groups, bereaved parents' groups, survivors of abuse.
- **Physical activity.** Studies have shown that doing physical activity can improve mental health. It releases endorphins that can improve mood naturally and also create an opportunity for release for pent-up cortisol and adrenaline which help us manage stress. Being physically active also gives our brains something to focus on and can be a positive coping strategy for difficult times.

- **Learning to relax.** If your anxiety just won't go away, it can be really helpful to learn some special ways of relaxing, to be a bit more in control of your anxiety and tension. You can learn these through groups, with professionals, but there are also many books and self-help materials you can use to teach yourself. It's a good idea to practice relaxation regularly, not just at times of crisis.
- **Using a self-help book.** This works well for many people. Most of the books use the principles of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

**Treatments and therapies:** anxiety disorders are generally treated with psychotherapy, medication, or both. There are many ways to treat anxiety and people should work with their doctor to choose the treatment that is best for them.

Certain substances such as caffeine, some over-the-counter cold medicines, illicit drugs and herbal supplements may aggravate the symptoms of anxiety disorders or interact with prescribed medication. Patients should talk with their doctor, so they can learn which substances are safe and which to avoid.

#### Support:

- Anxiety UK: Helpline: 08444 775 774; email: support@anxietyuk.org.uk. Charity formed 30 years ago by a sufferer of agoraphobia for those affected by anxiety disorders
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/ways-relieve-stress/>



- Free online Cognitive behavioural therapy resources: Living Life to the Full: free online life skills course for people feeling distressed and their carers. Helps you understand why you feel as you do and make changes in your thinking, activities, sleep and relationships. <https://www.headspace.com/>



## Are you listening? All about Tinnitus

Tinnitus is the perception of sound in the ears or head that does not come from an outside source, i.e. it is an unwanted auditory perception of internal origin. It is derived from the Latin word tinnire, which means "a ringing."

It is a **common condition**, with similar prevalence rates in children, young people and adults. It is estimated that:

- 10% of the population will have tinnitus at some point
- Some 3% of adults may require a clinical intervention for their tinnitus.

**Tinnitus symptoms** may range from ringing, hissing, buzzing, and roaring, to clicking or rough sounds. Some patients experience infrequent, soft sounds, while for others it may be unbearable. It may be one side or both sides. One-sided tinnitus, with or without associated hearing loss, is more serious.

**Tinnitus is caused by** incorrect processing of auditory stimuli due to:

- Structural disease of the hearing anatomy
- Perceptual abnormalities
- Psychological disease.

Most cases of tinnitus are benign, but since there are serious and treatable causes, it should always be assessed thoroughly.

Tinnitus can be associated with difficulty in concentrating and listening and, for some people, it can be extremely distressing and have a significant impact on their mental wellbeing, family, work and social life.

**Management of tinnitus** is usually tailored according to the person's symptoms. Although there is no single effective treatment for tinnitus there are a variety of approaches that may help people manage their tinnitus or the impact of tinnitus.

Tinnitus is often associated with hearing loss, e.g. 75% of people with hearing loss may experience tinnitus, while only 20-30% of people who report tinnitus have normal hearing.

There is an increasing prevalence of tinnitus with advancing age and with hearing problems.

The following factors are also associated with an increased incidence of tinnitus:

- Women more than in men
- Regular exposure to occupational or recreational noise
- Lower socio-economic class.

It is important to remember that tinnitus can disappear and improvement is usual.

Several treatments are available to help people cope with tinnitus. These include:

- Counselling
- Hearing aids: sometimes tinnitus is also associated with hearing loss and these patients may benefit from a hearing aid. Hearing aids amplify external sound which, for many, means that the internally produced unwanted noise is less intrusive.



## Seasonal affective disorder (SAD)

Every year we experience the seasons changing and that means less hours of sunlight and colder temperatures in the autumn and winter. It's quite normal for people to feel more sluggish in the winter months but with the increased tension and anxiety due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SAD season could be more difficult than usual this year.

**What is it?** SAD is a form of recurrent depression, which occurs at the same time each year, usually in winter, with symptoms lasting about **four to five months per year**.

A less common form of the disorder causes depression during the summer months, beginning in the late spring or early summer and remitting in the autumn.

**SAD causes:** the exact cause is not fully understood. SAD has been linked to a biochemical imbalance in the brain, prompted by shorter daylight hours and less sunlight in winter. SAD is more common in people living far from the equator, where there are fewer daylight hours in the winter.

SAD is four times **more common in women than in men** and certain people may be more vulnerable to SAD as a result of their genes, as some cases appear to run in families.

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, approximately 3% of us will be so seriously affected by SAD that it will interfere with our everyday lives.

**Symptoms of SAD:** these include those symptoms associated with major depression and some specific symptoms that differ for winter-pattern and summer-pattern SAD. Some people just find the condition a bit irritating, while for others, it can be severe and have a significant impact on their day-to-day life. Symptoms of SAD can include:

- A persistent low mood
- A loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities
- Irritability
- Feelings of despair, guilt and worthlessness
- Feeling lethargic (lacking in energy) and sleepy during the day
- Sleeping for longer than normal and finding it hard to get up in the morning
- Use of drugs or alcohol for comfort
- Craving carbohydrates and gaining weight.

**How is SAD treated?** Treatment for SAD can be similar to that for depression, as well as some additional options. These may include:

- Light therapy
- Psychotherapy
- Antidepressant medications
- Vitamin D.

**Self-help:** there are a number of simple things you can try that may help improve your symptoms, including:

- Try to get as much natural sunlight as possible – even a brief lunchtime walk can be beneficial
- Make your work and home environments as light and airy as possible
- Sit near windows when you're indoors

- Take plenty of regular exercise, particularly outdoors and in daylight
- Make sure you're getting enough sleep as it's essential for positive health and wellbeing
- Cut down on stimulants like alcohol and caffeine and restricting screen time before bed
- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- If possible, avoid stressful situations and take steps to manage stress. Relaxation tapes can help with this and improve overall mood
- During these strange times, it can feel harder than ever to stay connected with friends and family, but it can help prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation. From email and text messages to a good old-fashioned post, try to find ways to reach out to friends and family.

**Psychotherapy:** a type of psychotherapy known as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can be highly beneficial for people with seasonal depression. CBT is a type of talking therapy aimed at helping people learn how to cope with difficult situations. It can help to change negative patterns in how you think, feel and behave. It's an effective therapy for many types of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.

**Medication:** some people with SAD benefit from antidepressant treatment, especially if symptoms are severe. Any medication which would make people more tired or sleepy should be avoided, so SSRI antidepressants are usually used. SSRI antidepressants work by acting on serotonin levels in the brain to reduce SAD symptoms.

Antidepressants are thought to be most effective if taken at the start of winter before symptoms appear and continued until spring.

**Light therapy:** also called phototherapy, you sit a few feet from a special light box so that you're exposed to bright light within the first hour of waking up each day.

Light therapy mimics natural outdoor light and appears to cause a change in brain chemicals linked to mood. The idea is to try to provide extra light and to make up for the shortage of daylight in winter. A light box is usually used for 30 minutes to an hour each day. Light therapy works quite quickly and, if it is going to help, most people will notice some improvement in the first week.

Fortunately, any side-effects are usually mild. They include headache, nausea or blurred vision. It is usually best not to use a light box after 5.00 pm, because you may then find it hard to get to sleep. However, exposure to very bright light may not be suitable if you:

- Have an eye condition or eye damage that makes your eyes particularly sensitive to light
- Are taking medication that increases your sensitivity to light, such as certain antibiotics and antipsychotics, or the herbal supplement St John's Wort. Speak to your GP if you are unsure about the suitability of a particular product.

Dawn-simulating alarm clocks are also used. The device gradually increases the amount of light in your bedroom in the morning to simulate the rising sun and wake you up. The light gradually increases, just as natural sunlight does, over a period of 30 to 45 minutes. Instead of waking in darkness, you wake to what looks like a sunny morning. This can help reset your circadian rhythm and improve your mood.

**Vitamin D:** it is important to take this if you have been indoors more than usual this year. Because many people with SAD often have vitamin D deficiency, nutritional supplements of vitamin D may help improve their symptoms. Taking 10mcgs (400 IU) a day between October and early March may help (and it is recommended daily over winter). However, studies testing whether vitamin D is effective in SAD treatment have produced mixed findings, with some results indicating that it is as effective as light therapy but others detecting no effect. **Vitamin D foods include oily fish: salmon, sardines, mackerel; red meat; liver; egg yolk; fortified foods such as some fats and spreads and breakfast cereal.**

Many find life more challenging in the pandemic. It is inevitable that there will be a heightened risk of mental health problems occurring, including symptoms of depression. Whether you suffer from full-blown SAD or are feeling more down than usual at this time of year, there are things you can do to help boost your mood. If your symptoms of depression are overwhelming, it is always advisable to **speak to your GP**.

