

LONELINESS

Loneliness is not a diagnosed mental condition but it can have a significant impact on a person's mental health and can contribute towards other conditions, such as anxiety and depression. If a person has an existing mental health problem, then that can also make them feel lonely or isolated.

Loneliness is not the same as being alone, a person may enjoy living alone without much contact with people and, similarly, a person may have lots of friends and family but still feel lonely.

Some people experience deep and constant feelings of loneliness that do not disappear, regardless of how many friends they have or who they live with. As a result, these people may turn to drink or drugs in order to cope or escape their feelings.

PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks are short periods of intense, frightening symptoms that last around 5-20 minutes. They can cause a lot of distress for the person experiencing them as they feel a sense of overwhelming fear.

The person experiencing a panic attack may have difficulty breathing, find that their pulse increases rapidly, have chest pain or feel very faint and tremble. This is because a panic attack causes your body to go into 'fight or flight' mode and so tries to take in more oxygen, increases heart rate and prepares your muscles to deal with danger.

However, panic attacks can occur at any time and for no clear reason. They are also not directly linked to stressful situations.

USEFUL LINKS

For sufferers and supporters of those with mental health issues:

www.anxietyuk.org.uk	www.ocdaction.org.uk
www.bipolaruk.org.uk	www.ocduk.org
www.thecalmzone.net	www.rethink.org
www.mentalhealth.org.uk	www.papyrus-uk.org
www.mind.org.uk	www.samaritans.org
www.nopanic.org.uk	www.sane.org.uk/support
www.menshealthforum.org.uk	

EATING DISORDERS

A person has an eating problem if their relationship with food is difficult to manage, such as eating too much, eating too little, bingeing on unhealthy foods or denying themselves food completely.

For people with an eating disorder, such as bulimia or anorexia, their relationship with food and weight is likely to be on their mind nearly all of the time, making it a very time-consuming illness to have.

Eating problems are commonly connected to a person's difficult life experiences and not just their relationship with food. Focusing on food can be a way to disguise or control the problem and mask the difficult emotions.

Sometimes people with an eating disorder will not realise that their food habits are connected to an external issue.

SELF HARM

People may self-harm as a way of coping with distressing or overwhelming feelings or memories. It is sometimes a way of communicating when the person cannot think clearly or put their emotions into words.

Self harm doesn't necessarily mean hurting yourself physically, but can also mean not looking after your physical and emotional needs or actively putting yourself in dangerous situations.

Some people say that they self harm to feel in control of their negative thoughts yet, after harming, the cause of the distress is unlikely to have gone away.

Similarly, many people may experience suicidal feelings as part of their mental health problem. These thoughts can be scary and unwelcome. However, just because a person thinks about suicide it doesn't mean that they will commit to it, it may simply be a way of coping with their other distressing thoughts.

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Mental Health

Are you aware of the
invisible struggles affecting 1
in 4 of us?

Around a quarter of the population experience some kind of mental health problem in any one year, with anxiety and depression being the most common problems, affecting around 1 in 10 people.



DEPRESSION

Depression affects a person's mood, making them feel down, unmotivated, tired, worthless and hopeless, it can also have serious effects on a person's self-esteem.

The illness can interfere with a person's sleep, appetite, libido and physical health. This doesn't prevent the person from living a normal life but it can make things very difficult, particularly if they are struggling to see the worth in what they are doing.

Depression appears in many forms, ranging from making people feel slightly down to making people feel suicidal and all forms of depression have strong links with anxiety.

Postnatal depression is common in women after childbirth.

ANXIETY

Anxiety can affect a person both mentally and physically. Mentally, anxiety can cause constant, unrealistic worrying about daily life and can make even the smallest of tasks feel like the hardest job in the world. It can cause normal, everyday tasks to become overwhelming or fearful, making them very difficult for the person with anxiety to carry out.

Physically, anxiety can make a person feel restless, tense, shaky and tired and can have a significant impact on their sleep. Tense muscles can also cause headaches or stomach upsets.

People who are highly anxious may develop further problems, such as panic attacks, phobias or obsessive compulsive disorder, often as an outlet for some of the feelings they are experiencing.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

PTSD is one of the more serious effects of prolonged stress and is often triggered when a person is involved in or witnesses a traumatic event, such as sexual assault, serious injury, death of a loved one or experience of warfare. It refers to the upsetting, distressing feelings experienced after the event - whether it's straight away or months later.

Immediately after a traumatic event, the person may feel emotionally 'numb' and unable to place, or feel, their emotions. They will often relive the traumatic event through nightmares and flashbacks, and may experience feelings of isolation, irritability and guilt.

For many people, the symptoms will disappear over a short period of time, but for others they remain and lead to a diagnosis of PTSD.

PHOBIAS

A phobia is an exaggerated fear of a situation or object, such as being overly fearful of going outside, handling a certain material or being in a corridor with too many people.

People experiencing a phobia will often arrange their life around their phobia to avoid the thing they are afraid of.

The symptoms of a phobia are similar to those of anxiety, including irrational worrying, tension, tiredness and restlessness. Most people have fears about something but people with a phobia find that their fear significantly affects their everyday life. Very serious phobias can trigger panic attacks.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is a long-term mental health condition comprising of psychological conditions such as hearing voices, seeing things, delusions and confused thoughts.

A person with schizophrenia may have difficulty distinguishing between their own thoughts and reality. They may become upset, anxious, confused or suspicious of people who don't agree with or believe their thoughts about the world.

The symptoms of schizophrenia can have a great effect on everyday life, including work, relationships and personal care. The person may be unaware that they need help as their thoughts and beliefs are so convincing.

BIPOLAR DISORDERS

Bipolar Disorder or manic depression, means that the person is experiencing extreme mood swings, rapidly changing from severe highs to lows. In between these moods, however, the person may appear quite stable.

During the 'high' periods (manic episodes), the person is full of energy and may take on lots of commitments and activities, making them feel very productive. However, when the 'low' period of their illness sets in, the person is likely to find themselves unable to cope with these responsibilities.

Some people with bipolar disorder also experience hallucinations and/or delusions. These can greatly affect how a person perceives the world and can have a big impact on their everyday behaviour.

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

OCD is when a person exhibits compulsive or obsessive behaviour, related to unwelcome thoughts, ideas or urges that interrupt normal thought, causing fear or anxiety.

Examples include worrying about, not having turned an appliance off, not locking the front door or contaminated work surfaces.

Compulsive behaviour means that the person will repeatedly carry out a behaviour, such as repeatedly checking locks or washing their hands, in order to deal with the stress caused by the thought and relieve the anxiety that they are feeling.

STRESS

Stress itself is not a diagnosed mental illness, but it does have the ability to cause a myriad of mental health problems.

When you are stressed the hormone cortisol is released into the body to prepare you for 'fight or flight', increasing your heart rate and unbalancing your blood sugar levels.

In the short term this is usually positive and can help you to deal with stressful situations but, if experienced too often, it can have mental and physical negative consequences.

Everyone experiences stress as we constantly deal with demands from others and difficult people and situations, but paying attention to what stress can help to greatly reduce the negative effects associated with it. Learning to handle the causes (stressors) allows you to make changes or learn techniques to cope better.