

Chapter 1

Spotting the Signs of Anxiety and Depression

In This Chapter

- ▶ Working out how depression and anxiety affect you
 - ▶ Finding your personal starting point
 - ▶ Knowing when to get more help
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Everyone feels sad or worried from time to time. Such emotions are both natural and unavoidable. People worry about their children, bills, aging parents, jobs and health. And most people have shed a tear or two watching a sad film or reading a news story about a poignant tragedy. That's normal. Sadness and worry are part of the everyday range of human emotion.

However, the intensity of these emotions and the distress they cause can vary enormously. When sadness or worry becomes much more extreme, you may start to realise that you're suffering from something that can be quite disturbing. When the intensity starts to affect your life, the emotions can increase from sadness and worry to anxiety and depression. Yet even then, a certain amount of these stronger emotions is also completely usual and quite natural for people to experience.

The intensity of anxiety or depression can increase still further, and you can reach a level where you have an anxiety disorder or clinical depression. In these states, you feel extremely low and sad most of the time, or your worries continuously dominate your mind. At this point, you may be experiencing a real problem with depression or anxiety.



Anxiety and depression can affect how you think, behave, feel and relate to others. The discussion and questionnaires in this chapter help you work out if, and even how much, depression and anxiety are affecting your life. And after you understand what's going on, you can then start doing something about it.

Don't panic if the questionnaires in this chapter indicate that you have a few symptoms of anxiety or depression. Rest assured, most people do. We let you know if you should be concerned.



If you have many symptoms, their effects are severe or your life seems out of control, you should consult your GP or a mental health professional. These questionnaires aren't meant to take the place of qualified mental health professionals, as these people are the only ones who can really diagnose your problem.

Dwelling on Negative Thoughts

If you were able to eavesdrop on the thoughts whirling round inside a depressed person's mind, you might hear 'I'm a failure', 'My future looks bleak', 'Things just keep getting worse' or 'I regret so many things in my life'.

On the other hand, the thoughts of an anxious person might be 'I'm going to look a right idiot when I give that talk', 'I never know what to say at parties', 'Motorways scare the hell out of me', 'I know that the chances of a plane crashing are tiny, but flying scares me' or 'I'll have a nervous breakdown if my editor doesn't like what I write'.

Thoughts affect the way you feel. And the very lowest, most miserable thoughts can lead to depression, while anxiety more often arises out of thoughts to do with being judged or coming to harm. And, of course, people often have both types of thoughts.



Do your thoughts dwell more on the melancholy, dispirited or on the scary, alarming aspects of life? Fill out the questionnaire in Worksheet 1-1 to find out if your thoughts reflect a problem more related to anxiety or to depression. Tick each item that you feel applies to you.

Worksheet 1-1

Depressed and Anxious Thoughts Questionnaire

- Things are going from bad to worse.
- I worry all the time.
- I'm just no good for anything.
- I can't think of anything that's worth saying.
- No one would miss me if I were dead.
- I think I'm a failure.
- Thoughts race through my mind, and I can't get rid of them.
- I don't really look forward to anything.
- I'm constantly on edge when I'm with new people.
- The world would be much better off without me.
- I'm tormented with thoughts about past traumatic events.
- I find it impossible to make decisions.
- I hate being the centre of attention.
- My life's just full of regrets.
- I can't stand making mistakes.
- I can't see any light at the end of the tunnel (except for the one that's the headlight of an oncoming train!).
- I constantly worry about my health.
- I'm deeply ashamed of myself.
- I always go overboard in my preparations.

The preceding thoughts can occur to someone who's either depressed, anxious or both. The odd-numbered items point more towards depression and the even-numbered items to anxiety. This questionnaire isn't a test that you pass or fail. The more items you tick, the

more cause you have for concern. And if you tick more than eight to ten items, do seriously consider doing something about these difficulties. On the other hand, even if you tick only one item, but you fervently believe it, you still may be suffering from anxiety or depression and may well benefit from help.



If you have any thoughts of suicide or utter hopelessness, consult your doctor or a mental health professional immediately.

Recognising What You Do When You're Anxious or Blue

If you follow a depressed or anxious person, you're likely to see some behavioural signs of their emotional turmoil. That's because depression and anxiety, while experienced on the inside, affect what people do in the outside world. For example, a depressed person may look tired, move slowly or withdraw from friends and family; an anxious person may avoid socialising or speak in a quavering voice.



Complete the questionnaire in Worksheet 1-2 to see if your behaviour indicates that you may have a problem with anxiety and/or depression. Tick each statement that applies to you.

Worksheet 1-2

The Troubled Behaviour Questionnaire

- I've been crying for no obvious reason.
- I pace around when I'm worried.
- Sometimes I can't make myself get out of bed.
- I avoid going into crowded areas.
- I can't seem to make myself exercise.
- I avoid risks because I'm afraid of failure.
- Recently, I've stopped doing things for fun.
- I always play it safe.
- I've been missing work lately because I just don't feel motivated.
- I'm really fidgety.
- I'm doing everything more slowly, for no apparent reason.
- I avoid people or places that remind me of any previous bad experience.
- I no longer care what I look like.
- I spend too much time trying to make myself look good.
- I've lost my sense of humour and seldom laugh.
- My hands shake when I'm nervous.
- I've been letting things slide that really do require my attention.
- I feel I absolutely must repeat certain actions (such as hand-washing, checking locks, arranging things in a certain way and so on).

Like Worksheet 1-1, there's no pass or fail here – it's not a test. Interpret the results by understanding that the more items you tick, the greater the problem. Even-numbered items

reflect anxiety, and odd-numbered items largely indicate depression. And of course, like many people, you may have symptoms of both types of problem.

Sizing Up Stress

Depression and anxiety inevitably are accompanied by physical symptoms. Some people primarily experience changes in appetite, sleep, energy or pain, while experiencing few problematic thoughts. Symptoms of both anxiety and depression can directly affect your body. Though others can't see what you're feeling, they may well notice behavioural changes, like those covered in the preceding section.



The following questionnaire, Worksheet 1-3, helps you see if your body is trying to tell you something about your emotional state.

Worksheet 1-3 The Sensations of Sadness and Stress Questionnaire

- I've lost my appetite.
- My palms are constantly sweaty.
- I wake up very early in the morning and can't go back to sleep.
- I've been experiencing a lot of nausea and diarrhoea.
- I've been sleeping a lot more than usual.
- I feel shaky all over.
- I've been having lots of aches and pains for no good reason.
- My chest feels tight when I'm nervous.
- I seem to have no energy lately.
- My heart races when I'm tense.
- I've been constipated a lot more often than usual.
- I feel I can't catch my breath.
- I'm always hungry and can't stop eating.
- My hands often feel cold and clammy.
- I'm just not interested in sex.
- Sometimes I breathe very rapidly and end up hyperventilating.
- Every move I make takes more effort lately.
- I get dizzy easily.

The symptoms in this questionnaire can also be due to various physical illnesses, taking both over-the-counter and prescription drugs, or even drinking too much alcohol or very strong coffee. Be sure to consult your GP if you're experiencing any of the symptoms in The Sensations of Sadness and Stress Questionnaire. It's important to go for a check-up if you experience noticeable changes in your body.

Although physical sensations overlap in anxiety and depression, even-numbered items in the questionnaire above are most consistent with anxiety, and the odd-numbered items usually affect those with depression. No cut-off point identifies if you have a problem. The more statements you tick, the greater your problem.

Relating to Relationship Problems

When you're feeling low, distressed or anxious for any length of time, the chances are your relationships with other people suffer. Although you may think that your depression or anxiety affects only you, it has an impact on your friends, family, colleagues and acquaintances.



Go through Worksheet 1-4 to see if your feelings and emotions are having a negative effect on your relationships. Tick all statements that apply to you.

Worksheet 1-4

The Disrupted Relationship Questionnaire

- I don't feel sociable.
- I get edgy when I meet new people.
- I don't feel like talking to anyone.
- I'm super-sensitive to all criticism.
- I'm more irritable than usual with others.
- I worry about saying the wrong things.
- I don't feel close to anyone.
- I worry about being abandoned.
- I don't feel like going out anywhere, with anyone, any more.
- I'm troubled by disturbing fantasies of people I care about getting hurt.
- I've withdrawn from everyone.
- I feel uneasy when lots of people are around, so I stay away from anywhere crowded.
- I feel emotionally numb when I'm with people.
- I'm always uncomfortable in the spotlight.
- I feel that I don't deserve friendship and love.
- Receiving compliments makes me uncomfortable.

No cut-off score identifies if you're anxious or depressed. But the more items you tick, the more your relationships are being affected by your anxiety, depression or both. Odd-numbered items usually indicate problems with depression; even-numbered items particularly reflect anxiety.



Do be aware that many people are a bit shy or introverted. You can easily feel a little anxious when meeting new people or may feel uncomfortable in the spotlight. These feelings aren't necessarily anything to be concerned about. However, they can become a problem if you then avoid social activities or meeting new people.

Producing Your Personal Problems Profile

The Personal Problems Profile provides you with an overview of your troubling symptoms. (If you skipped the questionnaires in the previous sections of this chapter, do go back and take the time to complete them. You need your answers to complete this exercise.) This section helps you identify the ways in which anxiety and depression affect you. One good thing about creating a profile is that you can monitor changes in your symptoms as you work through the rest of this book.



Bill, a middle-aged engineer, doesn't consider himself depressed or bothered by any emotional problems. But when he sees his GP, Bill complains of fatigue, recent weight gain and a noticeable loss of his sex drive. After ruling out physical causes, the doctor suggests that he may be depressed. 'Funny you should say that,' Bill replies. 'My girlfriend's just bought me the *Anxiety & Depression Workbook For Dummies*. She also said she thought I was depressed. Maybe I'll take a look at the book.'

When Bill fills out his Personal Problems Profile (see Worksheet 1-5), he comes up with the following top ten symptoms and notes if they indicate anxiety or depression (with an A or D).

Worksheet 1-5	Bill's Personal Problems Profile
1.	I seem to have no energy lately. (D)
2.	Recently it seems every move I make takes so much more effort. (D)
3.	I'm just not interested in sex. (D)
4.	I'm always hungry and can't stop eating. (D)
5.	I don't feel like being sociable. (D)
6.	I don't really look forward to anything. (D)
7.	I find it impossible to make decisions. (D)
8.	I constantly worry about my health (A)
9.	I feel shaky all over. (A)
10.	Sometimes I can't make myself get out of bed. (D)

As you can see, Bill suffers primarily from symptoms of depression, and most of them are physical in nature. Filling out his Personal Problems Profile helps Bill see that he probably does have depression, even though he wasn't actually aware of it. He reflects on his discovery (see Worksheet 1-6).

Worksheet 1-6	Bill's Reflections
	I can see I do have some of the signs of depression. I didn't realise that before. My depression particularly takes the form of physical symptoms. It's affecting my energy, sex drive and appetite. It's also making me withdraw from my girlfriend. That's pretty obvious, given my loss of sex drive and that I'm no longer keen to be with her. I also seem to have a few symptoms of anxiety, and I think I've always had these sorts of feelings. I guess it's high time I finally did something about this.



Right! That's what Bill's decided. And you've chosen to read the *Anxiety & Depression Workbook For Dummies*. But please remember, this isn't just a book. It's a *work* book! Realistically, merely reading it is insufficient – you're unlikely to feel better unless you *do* something, that is, some work! And you're likely to find that the activities really aren't that difficult. Of course, you can skip a few of the exercises. But the more exercises you do, the sooner you start feeling better. Strange as it may seem, simply writing things down can actually do a world of good. The simple act of writing actually helps you remember, clarifies your thinking and increases your focus and reflection.

So now, it's time for you to complete your own Personal Problems Profile in Worksheet 1-7. Look back at the questionnaires earlier in this chapter and underline your most troubling thoughts, feelings, behaviours and relationship issues. Then, choose no more than ten of the most significant items that you've underlined and write them in the My Personal Problems Profile.

Put an *A* by the symptoms that are most indicative of anxiety (even-numbered items in the preceding questionnaires) and a *D* next to those that mainly reflect depression (odd-numbered items).

Worksheet 1-7	My Personal Problems Profile
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	
10.	

Look over your list. Do your symptoms primarily involve anxiety, depression or are they an equal mix of both? And do they seem to mostly affect your thoughts, feelings, behaviours or relationships? Take some time to consider your profile. What conclusions can you draw? Record them in Worksheet 1-8.

Worksheet 1-8	My Reflections

Choosing Your Challenge



Parts II through V of this workbook cover the areas of thoughts, feelings/emotions, behaviours and relationships. An obvious way of deciding which area to start with is to choose the one that causes you the most problems. Alternatively, you can work through them all in the order we present them. Whichever way you choose to start, you should know that all these areas are interrelated. For example, if you have anxious thoughts about being judged,

you're likely to avoid the spotlight (behaviour). And you could very well experience butterflies (feelings). In addition, you may also be super-sensitive to criticism from others (relationships).



We generally find that most people prefer to start by tackling the problem area that best fits their personal style. In other words, some people are 'doers', others are 'thinkers', still others are 'feelers' and some are 'relaters'. Use the Personal Style Questionnaire in Worksheet 1-9 to identify your preferred style.

Worksheet 1-9	Personal Style Questionnaire
Thinkers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I like facts and numbers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I tend to be a very logical person.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm a planner.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I like to think through problems.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I carefully weigh the costs and benefits before I act.
Doers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can't stand sitting around and thinking.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I like to take action on problems.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I like accomplishing things each day.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I get a kick out of overcoming obstacles.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I act first and think later.
Feelers	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm a very sensuous person.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I really love my creature comforts.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I love massages and hot baths.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music and art are very important to me.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm very in touch with my feelings.
Relaters	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm a people person.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I'd rather be with people than do anything else.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I care deeply about other people's feelings.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I'm very empathetic.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Relationships are more important to me than accomplishments.

Are you predominately a thinker, doer, feeler or relater? If you ticked substantially more items in one area than the others, you may want to start working in the section of this book that corresponds to that style:

- ✓ Thinker: Part II, Thought Therapy
- ✓ Doer: Part III, Behaviour Therapy

- ✓ Feeler: Part IV, Physical Feelings
- ✓ Relater: Part V, Relationship Therapy

Knowing When to Get More Help

Self-help tools are likely to be useful for everyone who puts effort into them. Many people find they can overcome minor to moderate emotional problems by working with books like this one. Nevertheless, some difficulties require professional help, perhaps because your anxiety or depression is especially serious or because your problems are simply too complex to be addressed by self-help methods.



Work through The Serious Symptom Checklist in Worksheet 1-10 to find out whether you should seriously consider seeking treatment from a mental health professional.



Tickling any one item from the list below means that you should strongly consider seeking professional help. Please realise that no such list can be all-inclusive. If you're really unsure whether you need help, do see a mental health professional for an assessment.

Worksheet 1-10

The Serious Symptom Checklist

- I have thoughts about killing myself.
- I feel hopeless.
- My sleep has been seriously disturbed for more than two weeks (both sleeping too little or too much).
- I've gained or lost more than a few pounds without trying to do so.
- I'm ignoring major responsibilities in my life such as going to work or paying the bills.
- I'm hearing voices when no one is around.
- I'm seeing things that aren't there.
- My drug use and/or drinking are interfering with my life.
- My thoughts race, and I can't slow them down.
- Someone I trust and care about has said I need help.
- I've been getting into numerous fights or arguments.
- I've been making really poor decisions lately (such as buying expensive or really unnecessary things, or getting involved in questionable business schemes).
- Lately, I've felt that people are out to get me.
- I haven't been able to get myself to leave the house except for absolute essentials.
- I'm taking risks that I never did before.
- Suddenly I feel like I'm a special person who's capable of extraordinary things.
- I'm spending considerably more time everyday than I should repeating actions such as hand-washing, arranging things and checking and rechecking things (appliances, locks and so on).
- I have highly disturbing flashbacks or nightmares about past trauma that I can't seem to forget about.

If you ticked one or more of the preceding statements and you're beginning to think that perhaps you need help, where should you go? Many people start with their GP, which is a

pretty good idea because your doctor can determine if your problems actually have a physical cause. If physical problems have been ruled out or treated and you still need help, you can:

- ✔ Find out if you can self-refer or if you need a GP letter to see your local Community Mental Health Resource Centre.
- ✔ Phone the Samaritans on 08457-909090 in the UK (local call rates) or in the Republic of Ireland, dial 1850-609090 (local call rates). Many Samaritan branches also offer local branch telephone numbers. You can also use the Samaritans textphones (for the deaf or hard of hearing): Dial 08457-909192 in the UK.
- ✔ Ask trusted friends or family for recommendations.
- ✔ NHS Direct is available by phone 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. The phone number is 0845-4647.
- ✔ If you have private health insurance, phone your insurance company and ask for recommendations.



Before or during your first session, talk to the mental health professional and ask if you'll receive a scientifically validated treatment for anxiety or depression. Unfortunately, some practitioners lack necessary training in therapies that have been shown by scientific studies to be effective. Also make sure that whoever you see is a qualified mental health practitioner.

At this point, take a moment and pat yourself on the back! Regardless of whether this is the first chapter you've read, we reckon you've made a pretty good start. And do take heart from the fact that every minute you spend working your way through this workbook is likely to substantially increase your chances of improving your mood.