

Moods, Anxiety and Substance Use: Part of Life

Feeling depressed or anxious

Part of the essence of being human is experiencing moods (e.g., anxious or depressed) and fluctuations in mood over the course of our lifetime. Much like the weather is both stable and always-shifting, so too, are our emotions. As such, we may feel 'low,' 'blue' or 'down' sometimes or feel grief over a loss, crisis or disappointment. Similarly, we may get anxious before a high-pressure event, a move or entering any setting that makes us feel insecure or self-conscious. We may worry about our health, the well-being of our friends and family members, about paying off our bills. If we never felt sad, anxious or worried in our lives, we wouldn't be human.

Using substances

We all use substances, many of which affect our mood. Whether we eat something that gives us pleasure (such as chocolate), enjoy a glass of wine to enhance a meal, or take a prescribed medication to control pain from a recent injury, the use of substances is an accepted part of life. Many people can use substances in moderation (whether legal or illegal), without experiencing problems. What we need to remember is that all substances have effects; some have greater risks.

When is it a problem?

The feelings won't go away

It is neither normal nor healthy to be in a constant state of dread, despair or worthlessness. This is true whether you're male or female, or whether you're a child, teenager or adult. When these depressed feelings, and/or worries and anxieties persist, when they're interfering with daily life, and/or when they're out of proportion to any triggering event, there may be an underlying clinical disorder that requires intervention.

Over 30% of people diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder have both existing at the same time. The most common symptoms of co-occurring depression and anxiety disorder are distressing thoughts, fatigue, insomnia, difficulties concentrating, and a lack of motivation.

Three of a kind

Mood disorders, anxiety disorders and substance use problems have a lot in common: they can each result in negative thoughts and feelings including helplessness, shame and guilt; they can each lead to avoidance behaviours and isolation from social life; and they can each strain personal relationships and coping resources, and interfere with daily functioning.

Potential problems with substances

Binge drinking on the weekend, over-use of prescription drugs, consuming 'club drugs' at a rave, drinking more than five cups of coffee, and smoking cocaine are all potentially problematic forms of substance use. Usually when problems arise from substance use, there are a range of other factors at work. And when depression or anxiety are in the mix, substance use may be a sign of self-medicating.

'Self-medicating' is using substances (without physician supervision) to attempt to dull, numb, or distract oneself from negative symptoms, pain and stress. Through substances like alcohol and other drugs, a person may be seeking to alleviate a sense of anxiety, depression, powerlessness, pain or boredom that may pervade their life. They may also be using the substances to try and relieve physical symptoms or side-effects of medications.

Warning Signs



As you can see, mood, anxiety, and substance use disorders have unique symptoms as well as symptoms common to all three conditions. The more information you can give your health care practitioner about the complete range of physical and psychiatric symptoms you feel, the better he or she will be able to identify the primary problem as well as any co-occurring problems

★ common warning signs

- you feel tired most of the time or have little energy left to get through the day
- you have trouble concentrating, remembering things or making decisions
- you feel helpless
- your sleep patterns have changed: you either need to sleep a lot or have trouble falling or staying asleep
- you often feel irritable, agitated or argumentative
- your symptoms interfere with daily life
- you feel guilty and ashamed

Inappropriate use of some prescription medications to address depression or anxiety can lead to substance use problems. Some medications such as benzodiazepines (a class of tranquilizers frequently prescribed for anxiety) can result in physical and mental dependency, and withdrawal can be very difficult.

The interactions between anxiety or depression and substance use are complex. While substances may be used as coping mechanisms by people with mental health problems, the substance use can also worsen or trigger anxiety or depression. For example, alcohol may temporarily relieve feelings of anxiety; however, long-term alcohol misuse and acute alcohol withdrawal can often increase anxiety levels. Depression and anxiety are also associated with long-term use or withdrawal from many substances, including stimulants, club drugs, cannabis, opiates and alcohol.

Another consideration is that there may be a common underlying cause that contributes to both mental health and substance use problems. For instance, people who have experienced adverse experiences such as trauma or abuse in childhood are much more likely to experience substance use problems, depression, and/or anxiety.

There is Hope — and Help

The good news is that mood, anxiety and substance use problems are treatable and manageable. Evidence-based treatments for anxiety disorders, major depression and substance use problems include medications and/or cognitive-behavioural therapy. Attention to lifestyle issues can also be very helpful. Recognizing you have a problem and talking to supportive friends and family are often the first steps toward recovery. Below are more resources you can access:

Your family doctor

Your community mental health team

► In the blue pages under **Health Authorities**

Information and referral

► **BC Mental Health Information Line**

604.669.7600 or 1.800.661.2121

► **BC Alcohol and Drug Information/Referral**

604.660.9382 or 1.800.663.1441

additional resources on back >

Medication

Benzodiazepines

are a class of minor tranquilizers including sleeping pills (e.g., Valium, Ativan, Xanax, Serax, Rivotril) that are prescribed to help people deal with sleep problems, muscle tension, anxiety, depression and stress. They are also known as sedatives or nerve pills. They can be helpful in the short-term for reducing anxiety and aiding sleep during a crisis in a person's life. Prolonged use is not recommended and can result in physical and mental dependency and severe withdrawal symptoms.

Antidepressants

are a class of medications that relieve symptoms of major depression. Antidepressants work to correct a chemical imbalance in the brain by acting on neurotransmitters (serotonin, noradrenaline and dopamine) which act as chemical messengers between brain cells. There are several different families of antidepressants, each having a slightly different effect on one or more of these chemicals. Several kinds of antidepressants can also help alleviate symptoms of anxiety disorders including panic or obsessive thoughts. Antidepressants aren't addictive, but discontinuing use must be a gradual process, and supervised by a treating physician.

Accessing counselling

Your workplace benefits

- **Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)**: for workplaces that have them in place, they are free, confidential counselling services for employees and family members
- **Extended health benefits** which often cover short-term psychotherapy with a registered psychologist each year

Fee for service

- **BC Psychological Association Referral Line** 1.800.730.0522
- **BC Association of Clinical Counsellors Referral Line** 1.800.909.6303

Support associations

- **Mood Disorders Association of BC** 604.873.0103 or www.mdabc.net
- **Canadian Mental Health Association, BC** 1.800.555.8222 or www.cmha.bc.ca
- **Anxiety Disorders Association of BC** 604.525.7566 or www.anxietybc.com
- **Centre for Addictions Research of BC's Substance Information Link** www.silink.ca

For more quality information on
mental health and substance use issues:
www.heretohelp.bc.ca



heretohelp

Mental health and substance use
information you can trust

Members: Anxiety Disorders Association of BC, BC Schizophrenia Society, Canadian Mental Health Association's BC Division, the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, FORCE Society for Kids' Mental Health, Jessie's Hope Society for Promoting Positive Body Image, and the Mood Disorders Association of BC. Funding is provided by the Provincial Health Services Authority.

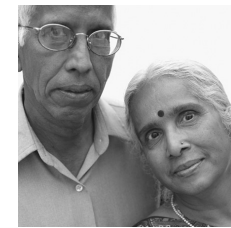
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Contact us c/o 1200-1111 Melville Street,
Vancouver, BC V6E 3V6 or via phone at
1.800.661.2121



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Mental health and substance use
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depression,
anxiety,
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and
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