



# HOW DO I KNOW IF I Need Help?

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What do **depression** and **anxiety** feel like?

How are they different from **sadness** or **stress**?

We all experience sadness and stress sometimes – these are **natural human responses to the challenges of life.**

It's normal to feel stressed if your job security is threatened, or you don't know how you can pay your bills, or to feel sad in response to loss - the loss of health or relationships, for example.

How can you distinguish these normal feelings from the mental health conditions, depression and anxiety?

Here are some indicators that might help you discern whether you are experiencing a mental health condition and would therefore benefit from seeking help.

## Depression feels like ...

**Experiencing the world through grey coloured glasses**

**Slow & sluggish - including movement and speech**

**No energy or motivation**

**Body shutting down**

**Everything is hard**

**A deep sadness**

**Heavy inside**

**Drowning**



**Take the self-test here:**

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources/depression/depression-self-test>

## Anxiety feels like ...

**Pervasive sense of foreboding**  
- that something will go wrong

**Rapid-fire thoughts that can become overwhelming**

*Have I upset someone?  
Did I look /sound stupid?  
Did I make a mistake?*

**Shallow, rapid breathing**

**Elevated heart rate**

**Clenched teeth**

**Agitated**

**On Edge**

**Uneasy**

**Tense**

**Jittery**



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## Signs of a Mental Health Problem you may notice at work

### A distinct change from normal that involves:

- Procrastination or lack of motivation
- Trouble concentrating and making decisions
- Withdrawing from colleagues or clients
- Angry outbursts or irritability
- Tearing up easily



### How is depression different from sadness?

Here are some key distinctions.

## Sadness

You feel sad in relation to something specific.

When the difficult situation that triggered your sadness improves, sadness subsides.

You are still able to enjoy things you loved before getting sad.

You have times when you don't feel sad at all, or can get relief from crying, venting, or talking about it with someone.

You may feel bad or guilty for something you did, but not a permanent sense of worthlessness.

Not associated with suicidal thoughts.

## Depression

Can be triggered by a specific event, or occurs for no apparent reason .

Doesn't resolve after any trigger is resolved.

You don't enjoy things that you normally get pleasure from.

You may experience some relief from low mood in the case of mild depression, but generally, depressed mood lasts for most of the day, nearly every day. In severe cases, depressive feelings are unrelenting.

You experience self-punishing and self-critical thoughts. Feeling hopeless and worthless is common.

Suicidal or self-harming thoughts can occur in cases of severe depression

**NB. There are different types of depression. Read more here:**

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources/depression/types-of-depression>



## What's the difference between stress and anxiety?

Stress and anxiety disorders share many of the same physical symptoms, such as being short of breath, rapid heartbeat or loss of sleep.

Here are some distinctions to help you tell them apart.



### Stress

Your body's reaction to some kind of threat.

Stress dissipates once the stressful trigger lessens or ends.

The cause tends to be external, such as an unrealistic deadline, an unhappy client or family conflict.

You feel you can tackle stress.

### Anxiety Disorder

Can be triggered by a stress - either ongoing stress or a specific event - but some people don't know why they feel anxious, which can add to the distress they feel.

The anxiety doesn't fade once the threat lessens or ends.

There may still be external triggers, but the anxiety is maintained due to an internal, persistent feeling of apprehension or dread, even in situations that are not actually threatening.

You don't feel you can handle the stress which can leave you feeling overwhelmed, even helpless.

**NB. There a number of different anxiety disorders. Read more here**

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/clinical-resources/anxiety/what-is-anxiety>

**Depression and anxiety often occur together.**

### ACTION:

If you are in any way concerned about your own mental health, **don't delay**, talk to your GP about it and ask for a referral to a psychologist, or book a session with your EAP provider.

**Early intervention helps you recover more quickly and experience less disruption to your work and personal life.**

### ABOUT THEA:

Thea is a workplace wellbeing advisor helping leaders and teams create healthy and sustainable ways of working. She offers:

- strategic advice on developing a wellbeing strategy for your workplace.
- tailored, evidence-based seminars and webinars on a range of wellbeing topics.
- niche offerings in response to emerging issues, such as The Reset Program, and Menopause@Work Training for Managers.