

## FEELING TIRED? IRRITABLE? FOGGY? BLUE? GET 6 TIPS TO HELP YOU BE YOUR MENTAL BEST

If you've felt unusually anxious or depressed in recent months, you're not alone. From Aug. 2020 to Feb. 2021, the number of U.S. adults with symptoms of anxiety or depression increased from 36.4 percent to 41.5 percent.<sup>1</sup> And, the amount of people failing to receive care for mental health concerns also increased, with the number of adults reporting unmet mental health care needs increasing from 9.2 percent to 11.7 percent.<sup>2</sup>

October 10 was [World Mental Health Day](#), making this month a great time to reflect on your own mental wellness and make sure you're practicing good self-care. Read on to discover common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as things you can do to improve your outlook and stay your mental best.

### SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY OR DEPRESSION

Anxiety and depression are often co-occurring conditions, and their symptoms often mimic each other. But you can generally tell the two apart by remembering that anxiety makes you feel wound up or on edge, and depression makes you feel sluggish and detached. Specifically, signs of anxiety can include racing thoughts, shakiness, increased heart rate, tightness in the chest and difficulty getting a full breath.<sup>3</sup> Symptoms of depression can include consistently feeling sad or negative, a lack of interest in things you once enjoyed, isolating yourself, fatigue, irritability and difficulty concentrating.<sup>4</sup>

### SELF-CARE FOR ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

The following self-care practices are important for optimal physical and mental health — and are especially key if you're suffering from symptoms of anxiety or depression.

- 1. Get plenty of sleep.** Most adults should sleep 7-8 hours every night to feel rested. If you don't get enough sleep, you're more likely to feel tired and irritable, be less productive and even be a danger to yourself and others behind the wheel.<sup>5</sup>
- 2. Eat well.** You know that eating a healthy diet is important for your physical health; now research shows that your diet is also key for good mental health. Remember to eat five or more servings of fruits and veggies every day, drink plenty of water, and avoid excess alcohol, caffeine and processed foods.<sup>6</sup>
- 3. Exercise regularly.** You probably know that getting out of your chair to stretch or walk around the block can do wonders to clear your head or boost your mood. Exercising regularly can also prevent symptoms of anxiety and depression or remedy them once they start. Try to move your body every day, and be sure to exercise 30 minutes or more at least three to five days per week.<sup>7</sup>
- 4. Breathe.** When you're feeling anxious, you're more likely to breathe from your chest. But breathing from your abdomen is more efficient and can help you feel more relaxed. Try doing this abdominal breathing exercise any time you feel stressed:

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Take a deep breath, expanding your abdomen fully.

(If you're used to breathing from your chest, this can take a little practice.) Hold your breath for

three seconds. Exhale fully, focusing on relaxing your body and silently thinking “calm” or another comforting word. Repeat until you feel more relaxed.

**5. Make time for people you enjoy.** Connecting with others can lower your blood pressure, increase your life expectancy, ease symptoms of anxiety and depression and contribute to your overall happiness. Even during busy, stressful times — especially during busy, stressful times — be sure to connect with friends and family, even if that means just grabbing lunch with a co-worker or texting a friend to say “hi.” Want to make more social connections? Try joining a book club or a walking group, or volunteer for a cause that’s meaningful to you.<sup>8</sup>

**6. Ask for help when you need it.** If you have concerns weighing you down or you’re feeling symptoms of anxiety or depression, find someone you can talk to, whether that’s a friend, family member, clergy person or a health care provider. If you decide to talk to a provider, here are a few options covered by your State of Iowa employee benefits:

- Doctor On Demand<sup>®</sup> provides video visits for affordable, confidential talk therapy from psychologists and prescriptions\* from psychiatrists, all from the comfort of home. Visit [DoctorOnDemand.com](https://www.doctorondemand.com) to register for the service, take a short mental health assessment and schedule your confidential appointment.
- The Employee Assistance Program offers confidential resources such as short-term counseling and long-term referrals, legal or financial consultations, and information about topics that impact families like childcare and eldercare assistance. See [Employee Assistance Program](#) for more information.
- Your primary care doctor or a mental health provider can deliver information, referrals, care and prescriptions for mental health concerns. Visit [Wellmark.com/finder](https://www.wellmark.com/finder) to locate in-network providers near you.

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1 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7013e2.htm>

2 <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7013e2.htm>

3 <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/addressing-your-mental-health-by-identifying-the-signs-of-anxiety-and-depression>

4 <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/addressing-your-mental-health-by-identifying-the-signs-of-anxiety-and-depression>

5 <https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/features/getting-enough-sleep.html>

6 <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/news/20150820/food-mental-health>

7 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/in-depth/depression-and-exercise/art-20046495>

8 <https://www.mhanational.org/connect-others>

\*Doctor On Demand physicians do not prescribe Scheduled I-IV DEA Controlled Substances and may elect not to treat or prescribe other medications based on what is clinically appropriate. During times of high overnight call volume, you may be directed to make an appointment with a Doctor On Demand physician for the following morning.

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