



Understanding anxiety and depression: A guide to getting support for 13–17 year olds

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is that nervous feeling you might get when you are facing something challenging or stressful like before a test or a speech. It's the brain's way of helping you stay alert and get ready to deal with the situation. It can help you focus and improve your performance.



Need help to find a GP, mental health professional or healthcare service.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it:

- shows up when there are no big changes or challenges going on in your life
- stays and doesn't go away
- makes everyday things like going to school or socialising with friends difficult
- causes things like having trouble sleeping, racing heartbeat or panic attacks
- makes you feel overwhelmed and exhausted.

What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad or upset. It's different from ordinary sadness, which usually passes with time or after doing something that helps you feel better. Depression is a serious condition that affects how you feel, think, and act most of the time.

Depression can:

- make you feel sad, tired, or irritable nearly every day
- make it hard to enjoy things you used to like
- make it hard to sleep
- make it hard to focus or make decisions
- affect your energy, concentration and motivation
- last for weeks or longer, even when you try things that usually help.

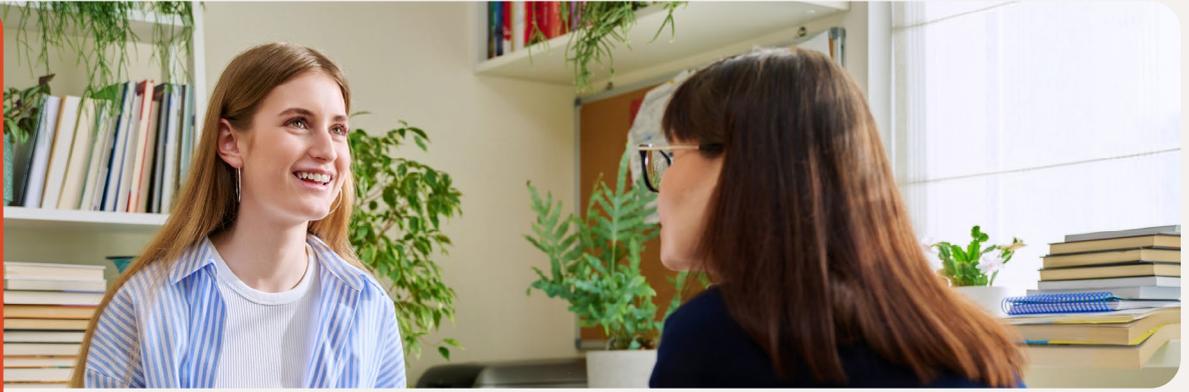
If depression and/or anxiety are starting to affect your life, it's a good idea to seek professional help. A GP or mental health professional can work with you to decide what's needed to help you get back your usual self.



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Medicine for anxiety and/or depression



It's important to remember that most of the time depression and/or anxiety won't need to be treated with medicine. But sometimes a GP, psychiatrist, paediatrician, or nurse practitioner will prescribe medicine as treatment.

About Antidepressants

Antidepressants, especially a type called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) – such as fluoxetine – are the most common medicines used for depression and/or anxiety. Prescriptions can be sent to your phone as an e-script. Learn more:

What to Expect

Antidepressants usually take:

- 2–3 weeks to start working
- up to 8 weeks to reach full effect.

Your doctor will usually start you on a low dose (sometimes $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the full dose) and increase it slowly to try to avoid side effects.

While your body gets used to the medicine, you might notice side effects such as:

- Nausea (feeling sick in your stomach)
- Headaches
- Sleep issues
- Feeling agitated, annoyed, or dizzy

These side effects often improve after a few weeks but let your doctor or pharmacist know if you experience any side effects. **They might recommend:**

- Taking the medicine at a certain time of day
- Taking it with food

Important things to remember

- Never stop taking medicine suddenly. Always check with your doctor first.
- Never share medicine with someone else, even if they have similar symptoms.
- Regular check-ins with your GP are important to track how things are going.



A note on safety

Getting the right treatment usually lowers the risk of harm in the long term. If you're worried about your safety, call a crisis line, contact your doctor, or reach out to a trusted person.

There will be a health check before anything is prescribed. Be honest about your use of alcohol or other substances, as some medicines don't mix well with them. Medicine is usually combined with psychological therapies (like CBT) and lifestyle changes such as:

- more physical activity
- good sleep
- making healthy food choices
- reducing alcohol and other drugs.



What are psychological therapies?

Psychological therapies are often known as talking therapies. They can help people change unhelpful thinking patterns, manage emotions, and cope better with life's challenges. They can be an effective treatment for depression and/or anxiety and help prevent them from returning.

Psychological therapies can be provided by:

- Psychologists
- GPs
- Mental health social workers
- Mental health occupational therapists
- Mental health nurses

Some therapies can also be done online through secure video sessions or digital therapy programs. Your GP can help you find a mental health professional or online program that suits you.

Types of psychological therapies

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
- Counselling
- Exposure Therapy
- Positive Psychology
- Mindfulness and Meditation
- Digital CBT and online therapy tools or apps

Finding the right fit

Not every therapy suits everyone. It may take some time to find what feels right. Therapy can be short-term, long-term, or ongoing, depending on what your needs. If you're concerned about cost or access, talk with your GP about options and ways to find a therapy that works for you.



A note about AI chatbots for mental health support

Chatbots can support mental health therapies, but there are no guidelines or regulations. This makes them a risk. Click here for more information about tips for using AI for mental health support. Remember that Chatbots:

- aren't always accurate
- can't totally replace a trained mental health professional
- can't replace human connection, social support and professional therapy.



Getting the right treatment

Getting the right treatment usually lowers the risk of harm in the long term. If you're worried about your safety, call a crisis line, contact your doctor, or reach out to a trusted person.

For support in a crisis:

- Emergency services **000**
- Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
- 13YARN 13 92 76 www.13yarn.org.au
- Suicide Callback Service 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

There are options for long-term support, such as:

- Trusted family member or trusted family friend
- School, university/TAFE, workplace counsellor
- GP or other health professional
- Kidshelpline 1800 55 1800
- Kidshelpline WebChat: www.kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling
- headspace www.headspace.org.au
- ReachOut www.reachout.com

If you need help right now and can't wait to see a GP, call 000 or go to the Emergency Department straight away.

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