



## POTENTIAL SIGNS OF DETERIORATING MENTAL HEALTH

*Not an exhaustive list and not necessarily a confirmation. Remember, we are not psychiatrists or psychologists. Professional help should be sought for any significant worries.*

One widely recognised visualisation is the concept of the stress container. Everyone has one and stresses flow into it.

If the container overflows then problems can develop. People with a low vulnerability to stress have a larger container and vice versa. It isn't possible to prevent stresses flowing into the container as this happens via life events.

But it is possible to let the stresses out of the container by learning and adopting helpful coping methods. The following are among the signs that the stresses in the container may be building up to unhealthy levels.

In the interests of time I will focus on the more common mental health problems of depression and anxiety. In practice it is often seen that both conditions present at the same time. These are some of the potential warning signs of depression:

- An unusually sad mood that does not go away. Sadness and depression are often used interchangeably as if they were the same thing. They are not. The key element to watch out for is how long the feeling persists. Feelings which last for more than 2 weeks are something to watch out for.
- Loss of enjoyment and interest in activities that used to be enjoyable
- Lack of energy and tiredness. This in itself can lead to loss of enjoyment of activities
- Poor self-esteem or a loss of confidence
- Feeling guilty about situations which a reasonable observer would not fault you for
- Difficulty in concentrating or making decisions

- Having difficulty in getting to sleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much
- Loss of interest in food or eating too much
- Bleak and pessimistic views of the future
- Having suicidal thoughts or thinking the world would be better off without you
- Feeling emotionally blunted
- Feeling anxious, irritable, angry or over-reacting to situations
- A perception of loss of control over emotions

People with depression may look and act depressed or anxious or they may not. Particularly with milder cases the person will often attempt to hide the depression from others and may be successful at that.

The signs and symptoms can also vary between men and women. For example men are more likely to try to hide the condition with overuse of alcohol which shows up as a dependency. On further diagnosis the true problem then emerges.

The list above clearly has a lot of potential signals on it but the key thing to remember is to seek professional help if you are identifying with more of them than you would like. A negative thought system links many of them.

Anxiety and depression are very different mental health conditions but they can often occur together. One key difference between the two is that symptoms of anxiety can be much more physical in nature. They can include:

- Palpitations, chest pain, rapid heartbeat or flushing
- Hyperventilation
- Dizziness, sweating, headache, tingling or numbness
- Choking, dry mouth, nausea, more frequent trips to the bathroom
- Muscle aches and pains especially neck, shoulders and lower back
- Restlessness, tremor or shaking

However, anxiety also has psychological and behavioural effects. These can include:

- Excessive fear or worry about past and future events
- Mind racing or going blank
- Decreased concentration and memory
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Irritability, impatience or anger
- Confusion
- Restlessness or feeling on edge
- Tiredness, sleep disturbances and vivid dreams
- Unwanted, unpleasant and repetitive thoughts

Clearly some of these overlap with symptoms of depression but since the two conditions are different it is important not to make assumptions about one or the other without seeking medical help. Anxiety can be socially debilitating. It can make people avoid situations, experience distress in them or have an

urge to escape situations that cause discomfort. It can also lead to repetitive compulsive behaviour. There are many types of anxiety disorder but Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder and Obsessive-Compulsive disorder are among the more common.

The NHS has an [online Mood Self-Assessment tool](#) which can be found on their website and which we will post a link to on our upcoming MH page on the DP website. By all means take the test but please remember there is no substitute for professional medical advice if it is required.

For further resources, please go to the Diversity Project website:  
[www.diversityproject.com/mental-health](http://www.diversityproject.com/mental-health)