

Mental Health Tips and Insights from North York General's Experts

Today, 1 in 5 Canadians experience a mental illness or addiction in any given year, from child and adolescence to adulthood. In light of that staggering statistic, we are committed to delivering exceptional mental health programs led by extraordinary health care professionals.

Today we are sharing some insights and tips on anxiety and depression — two prevalent mental health challenges — from NYGH health experts. Our hope is to promote greater understanding, awareness and coping mechanisms for those who may be struggling.



For decades, mental health issues seemed to fly under the radar. Stigma often kept conditions like anxiety, depression — and those who suffered from them, shrouded in mystery and shame. Thanks to increased public awareness and the growth of supportive programs, fueled in part by the growth in mental health challenges over the pandemic, this has started to change.



Psychologist, Dr. Sandra Doyle-Lisek and Therapist Adam Green from NYGH's Child & Adolescent Mental Health team share insight into anxiety and depression — two prevalent mental health challenges — and tips on coping. As always, please consult your physician if you have any concerns or questions about your personal health and well-being.

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Therapist Adam Green from NYGH's
Child & Adolescent Mental Health team

What to do if you or a loved one need help:

- Speak with your family doctor to create a personalized plan to address what's going on. Having a plan itself can help make the situation feel better
- Reach out to trusted friends and family
- Connect with a helpline such as the North York Toronto Health Partners Mental Health and Addictions Access Point support line at 416-640-1934, open from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday to Friday, or Distress Centres of Toronto, available 24/7 at 416-408-HELP (4357).
- If in a mental health crisis, go to your nearest Emergency Department, which can connect you to resources in an expedited way.

Depression

Depression is a common and serious medical illness. It can cause feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease one's ability to function at work and at home.

Listed below are signs to watch for if you suspect a friend or loved one is suffering from depression.

Feelings of despair and hopelessness

Detachment from life and the people around you

Consistently feeling tired or having no energy

Feelings of sadness that lead to crying for no apparent reason

Inability to concentrate or make decisions

Thoughts of harming oneself or others

A loss of appetite or a change in sleep patterns

Headaches or stomach upsets that occur frequently

Doyle-Lisek and Green offer these tips for coping with depression:

Create a structured routine and stick to it each day even if you don't feel up to it

Identify enjoyable activities and make the effort to participate in them

Find/maintain purpose in your life, a 'reason' to get out of bed each day

Set a goal each day for what you want to achieve

Get out in nature as often as possible

Create a healthy sleep routine and be mindful of not sleeping too little or too much

Engage in physical activity

Maintain social connections

Anxiety

Anxiety disorders are the most common of all mental health problems, affecting 1 in 10 Canadians. They include generalized anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorders and social phobias. While these disorders can be successfully treated, it's important to recognize the difference between feeling anxious in response to a real event and an anxiety disorder causing fear or distress out of proportion to the situation.

Listed below are signs to watch for if you suspect a friend or loved one is suffering from an anxiety disorder.

Feeling restless, wound-up, on-edge or irritable

Being easily fatigued

Having difficulty concentrating

Having headaches, muscle aches, stomach aches, or unexplained pains

Difficulty controlling feelings of worry

Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep

Doyle-Lisek and Green offer these tips for dealing with anxiety:

Try relaxation and breathing techniques. There are many apps that offer guidance in these practices

Practice mindfulness. Paying attention and trying to remain focused on the present moment helps prevent the mind from focusing on worried thoughts

Try to maintain a regular sleep schedule

Work on identifying things that are in your control

Think about alternative perspectives, not just worst-case scenarios