

Monitoring the Physical Symptoms

Anxiety and Depression

When it comes to mental health disorders, physical symptoms are usually the first indicator that one is struggling. It is equivalent to one struggling with a physical illness; these symptoms could indicate a larger issue that needs to be addressed further. Knowing what to look out for can help parents and loved ones be able to identify a potential issue.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) has criteria to meet for each mental health disorder which includes manifestation of physical symptoms. The following are criteria that would be listed for each disorder that are physical symptoms¹:

Anxiety Disorders:

- Headaches
- Stomachache
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Insomnia
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Muscle tension
- Gastrointestinal issues (bloating, diarrhea, constipation)

There are additional physical symptoms when one experiences panic attacks or being in a state of panic. Those symptoms may include:

- Palpitations, pounding heart or increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath
- Hyperventilation
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Nausea or abdominal distress
- Dizziness, feeling unsteady, lightheaded or faint
- Chills or increased body heat sensation
- Numbness or tingling
- Tinnitus – a ringing sound in the ear
- Neck soreness

¹ American Psychiatric Association: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition. Arlington, VA, American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

Depression:

- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Decreased or increased appetite (may accompany with significant weight loss or gain)
- Feeling restless OR feeling slowed down
- Fatigue
- Loss of energy
- Joint or muscle pain
- Heavy, leaden feelings in the arms or legs
- Headaches
- Digestive issues (including constipation or diarrhea)
- Dizziness or lightheadedness

To note, these symptoms are ones to look out for if you suspect your child or loved one is struggling with a mental health disorder. Although these symptoms listed above could indicate an organic issue, they also could indicate one struggling with anxiety or depression. Additionally, decrease in frequency, severity and duration of these symptoms could indicate progress in a therapeutic program.