

WINTER 2026

# Wellness Guide

BY HEALTH FOR ALL



# MENTAL HEALTH

*Emotional Resilience for Life*

## LONELINESS

Causes and Health Consequences

## CONSTANT ANXIETY AND WORRY

How to make it stop

## SELF-SOOTHING TECHNIQUES

5 effective techniques to help you cope with anxiety

## LIGHTEN YOUR MENTAL LOAD

Sometimes laughter really is the best medicine

## DEPRESSION

How can you tell whether you have insulin resistance?

## FEAR OF ABANDONMENT

helpful tips for dealing with abandonment issues





# Loneliness: Causes and Health Consequences

## AND WHAT VULNERABLE INDIVIDUALS CAN DO TO FEEL CONNECTED AGAIN

Loneliness is often mistaken for simply being alone. In reality, loneliness is a painful emotional state that occurs when a person feels disconnected, unseen, or unsupported—regardless of how many people may be around them. A person can be surrounded by others and still feel profoundly lonely.

For vulnerable populations—older adults, individuals with disabilities, caregivers, those living in poverty, people with chronic illness, trauma survivors, and socially isolated individuals—loneliness is not just an uncomfortable feeling. It is a serious health concern with real physical and mental consequences.

# What Causes Loneliness?

Loneliness develops when a person's need for meaningful connection is not met. For vulnerable individuals, this can happen for many reasons:

- Loss of a spouse, family member, or friends
- Living alone or having limited mobility
- Chronic illness or disability that limits social interaction
- Caregiving responsibilities that reduce time for social life
- Cognitive limitations or mental health struggles
- Poverty and lack of transportation
- Trauma history that makes trusting others difficult
- Shame about living conditions, finances, or life circumstances
- Feeling like a burden to others
- Language or cultural barriers for immigrants

Over time, these factors can create a cycle: isolation leads to loneliness, and loneliness makes it harder to reach out.



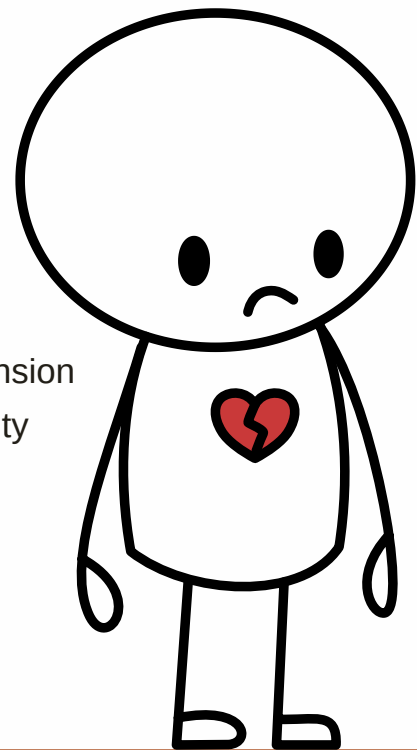


# The Health Consequences of Loneliness

Research has shown that loneliness is more than emotional pain—it affects the entire body.

Chronic loneliness is associated with:

- Increased risk of depression and anxiety
- Higher risk of heart disease and stroke
- Weakened immune system
- Increased inflammation in the body
- Sleep disturbances
- Cognitive decline and increased risk of dementia
- Poorer management of chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension
- Increased risk of premature death comparable to smoking and obesity



**Loneliness keeps the body in a constant stress response. The brain interprets social isolation as a threat, releasing stress hormones that, over time, wear down physical and mental health.**



## Why Vulnerable Populations Are at Greater Risk

Individuals who already face health challenges, financial stress, or limited support systems are especially at risk because:

- They may lack transportation to see others
- They may feel embarrassed asking for help
- They may not know where to find social resources
- They may believe they are a burden
- They may have lost the roles that once gave their life meaning

Loneliness often grows quietly in these situations until it begins to affect health and daily functioning.

### **What a Person Can Do to Alleviate Loneliness**

The good news is that loneliness is treatable. Connection can be rebuilt, even in small ways.

#### **Start with Small, Safe Contact**

Connection does not have to begin with large social events. It can start with:

- A phone call to a friend or family member
- Talking with a neighbor
- Attending a small group at a church, community center, or clinic
- Speaking with a case worker, therapist, or volunteer

Small, consistent contact matters more than large, occasional interactions.

# Engage in Purposeful Activity

Purpose reduces loneliness. Activities such as:

- Volunteering
- Caring for a pet responsibly
- Participating in a wellness or support group
- Attending educational classes
- Helping others in small ways



**PURPOSE GIVES PEOPLE A REASON TO INTERACT WITH OTHERS.**





# CONSTANT ANXIETY AND WORRY

Many individuals who struggle with anxiety-related conditions are significantly impacted by persistent, intrusive thoughts. However, worry is only one component of anxiety. Worry is the sense of unease or mental preoccupation that arises when your thoughts focus on current life stressors or on potential problems that have not yet happened — and may never happen

## Common symptoms

- Avoiding social situations
- Difficulty concentrating
- Excessive worry
- Feeling tense
- Irritability
- Physical symptoms such as muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue
- Problems sleeping
- Restlessness

Because worry is closely tied to anxiety, it commonly appears in individuals diagnosed with anxiety disorders. Persistent anxiety that feels constant or difficult to trace to a specific cause may be indicative of generalized anxiety disorder (GAD).

Certain patterns of worry are especially common within specific diagnoses. For instance, individuals with panic disorder may frequently worry about when their next panic attack will occur.

Anxiety can have a variety of causes including genetics, changes in brain chemistry, environmental influences, stress, personality characteristics, and trauma. Getting an assessment to determine the cause can make a big difference in coming up with an effective treatment plan.



### Focus on What You Can Control

Other things that are helpful at curbing worry and anxiety are:

- **Exercise**
- **Getting Enough Sleep**
- **Practice Gratitude**
- **Put your mind elsewhere**
- **Practice coping skills**



# HOW TO DISTRACT YOURSELF

- Do some chores inside or around the house, such as laundry or gardening
- Exercise or engage in a physical activity
- Read a book, magazine, or newspaper
- Organize your home or office
- Watch a funny movie
- Engage in a creative activity, such as drawing or writing

## Get Support

Talking with a trusted friend or family member can help you feel calmer and more supported. Sometimes simply hearing another person's perspective can shift how you view your worries. Sharing your concerns for a few minutes may be helpful, but try not to let worry dominate the entire conversation. A supportive person can also help redirect your attention toward something more grounding or positive.

Building a support network when living with panic disorder, panic attacks, or agoraphobia can take time and effort. Many individuals with these conditions feel isolated or find it difficult to reach out. However, having people you can lean on often reduces the intensity of worry and helps you feel less alone.

If you are feeling lonely or uncomfortable opening up to others, consider processing your worries through writing. Journaling can help you organize your thoughts and see patterns more clearly. Once your worries are on paper, you may find it easier to step back and view the bigger picture.

Try listing possible solutions or next steps for each concern. It can also be helpful to balance your worries by writing down things you are grateful for. When anxiety is high, it is easy to overlook the positive aspects of your life. Intentionally acknowledging them can provide perspective and emotional relief.



## Counseling

A professional can evaluate your symptoms, provide an appropriate diagnosis, and recommend treatments that can help. Treatments for anxiety disorders often involve psychotherapy, medications, or a combination of the two.

Health for All offers mental and behavioral health counseling.

To schedule an assessment, call  
**979-774-4176**

# Self-Soothing Techniques

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that approximately 31% of U.S. adults will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives.

When anxiety is not addressed effectively, it can intensify over time. Symptoms may become more persistent or severe, affecting daily functioning. Untreated anxiety can also strain relationships with partners, family members, and friends, and may interfere with work performance and overall quality of life.

To help manage rising anxiety, consider practicing one or more of the following self-soothing techniques.



- The Worry Jar
- Positive Affirmations
- Journaling
- Physical Grounding
- Breathing Exercises



## The Worry Jar

Excessive worry is a common symptom of anxiety. The “worry jar” exercise is designed to help you acknowledge anxious thoughts without becoming consumed by them. By symbolically setting your worries aside, you create psychological distance and regain a sense of control.

Try the following:

1. Write your specific worry on a piece of paper.
2. Fold the paper several times.
3. Place the folded paper into a designated “worry jar.”
4. Close the lid and set the jar aside.

You can also close your eyes and visualize placing the worry in the jar if you do not have one nearby. The purpose of the exercise is not to ignore your concerns, but to remind yourself that you can contain them rather than allowing them to dominate your thoughts.

## Positive Affirmations

Positive affirmations are brief, intentional statements designed to challenge negative thinking patterns and reinforce healthier, more balanced beliefs. When practiced consistently, affirmations can strengthen self-confidence, increase emotional resilience, and help shift attention away from self-criticism and toward self-support.

Like any new skill, using affirmations effectively takes repetition and patience. Over time, you may begin to notice subtle shifts in how you speak to yourself and respond to stress.

You might start with affirmations such as:

- I feel grounded in this moment.
- I will focus on today, one step at a time.
- I am worthy of love and respect.
- I trust myself to handle what comes my way.
- I give myself permission to rest.
- I release thoughts that no longer serve me.





## Journaling

Journaling can be a powerful tool for processing thoughts and emotions. Writing things down allows you to step back and view your experiences from a different perspective. Whether you are creating a simple to-do list for the next day or composing a deeper personal reflection, journaling encourages you to slow your thinking, regulate your emotions, and place challenges into clearer context.

There is no single “right” way to journal. Some people prefer structured prompts, while others write freely without editing or censoring themselves. You might experiment with different formats—such as gratitude lists, thought records, mood tracking, or stream-of-consciousness writing—and adjust your approach as needed to keep the practice engaging and sustainable.

*Writing is good for the soul*

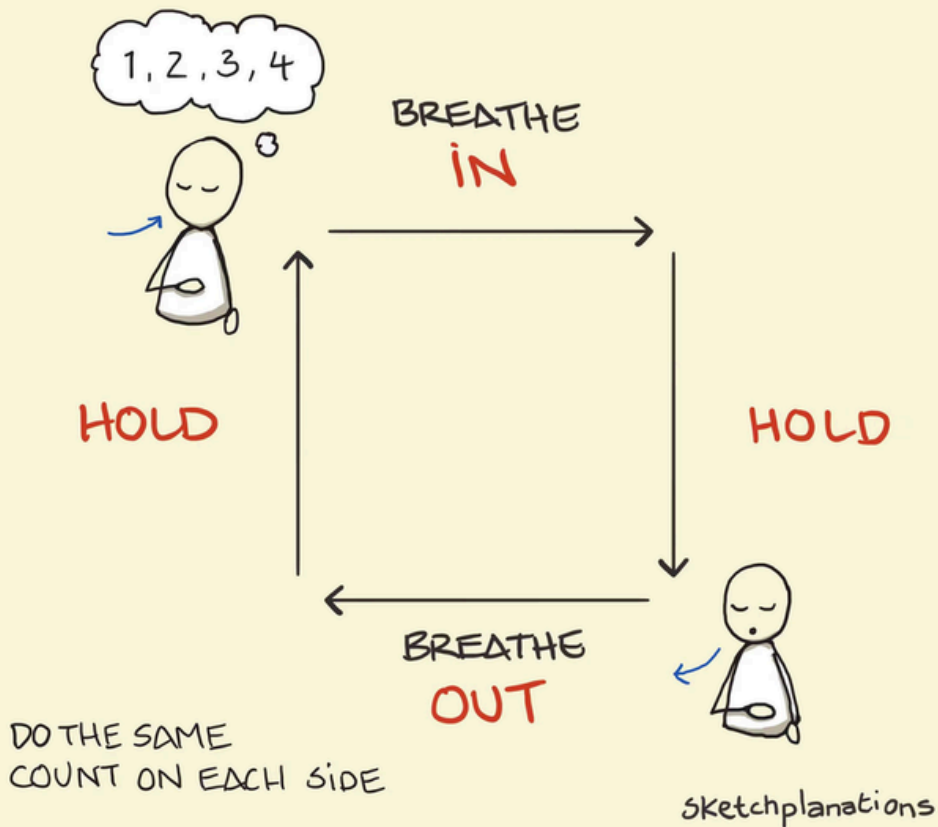
# GROUNDING

This self-soothing technique is especially effective in the moment when you feel your stress and anxiety rising or spiraling. Here are a few ways you can physically ground yourself:

- Pick up an object and make observations about it. How heavy or light is it? Is it soft or hard, smooth or rough? What's the texture like? Does it have edges? A scent?
- Focus on feeling whatever is touching your body. If you are standing, what does the ground beneath your toes and feet feel like? If you're in a chair, is it soft, firm, or cozy? What do the clothes feel like that you're wearing?
- Place your hands under running water. Notice how the fluid feels moving over your palms and between your fingers. Is it warm or cold? A light trickle or a heavy flow?
- Breathe in a favorite scent. Observe the notes. Maybe it is a candle, an article of clothing, a fresh flower, or a perfume.



# BOX BREATHING



This sixty second breathing technique is used by first responders, trauma nurses, and even Navy SEALs. It's called Box Breathing, and it's perfect for calming your brain and body when stress hits.

Your sixty second reset:  
Visualize a box. As you breathe, imagine the air moving along each side of that box.  
Across the top as you inhale.  
Down the side as you hold.  
Across the bottom as you exhale.  
Up the other side as you hold again.

## Now try it:

- Inhale for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- Exhale for 4 seconds
- Hold for 4 seconds
- → Repeat the square three or four times.

## Why it matters:

- It slows your heart rate and steadies your breathing
- It improves focus, especially when your mind is racing
- You can do it anytime: before a meeting, after hard news, or during busy transitions

"We teach our patients that breathing is more than automatic. It's therapeutic."

*Elizabeth Dickey*  
*Health for All*  
*Executive Director*



# Lighten Your Mental Load

*Sometimes laughter really is the best medicine*

**Humor can be a helpful tool for managing anxiety, providing both immediate relief and longer-term emotional benefits.**

When you laugh, your body releases endorphins—natural chemicals that elevate mood and foster a sense of well-being. At the same time, laughter can lower cortisol levels, the hormone associated with stress. By reducing this stress response, humor may ease some of the physical symptoms of anxiety and help you feel more relaxed and balanced.



**The Bible says in Proverbs that a merry heart does good like medicine.**

**These quotes are sure to make you feel better.**

- “Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.” — Anne Lamott
- “Be obscure clearly.”- E. B. White
- “Cure for an obsession: get another one.”- Mason Cooley
- “Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive.”- Elbert Hubbard
- “I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, but most of them never happened.”- Mark Twain
- “I have a new philosophy. I'm only going to dread one day at a time.”- Charles M. Schulz
- “I just give myself permission to suck...I find this hugely liberating.”— John Green
- “I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.”- Douglas Adams
- “I quit therapy because my analyst was trying to help me behind my back.”- Richard Lewis
- “If at first you don't succeed, find out if the loser gets anything.”- William Lyon Phelps
- “Life is hard. After all, it kills you.”- Katharine Hepburn
- “One advantage of talking to yourself is that you know at least somebody's listening.”- Franklin P. Jones
- “Reality continues to ruin my life.”- Bill Watterson
- “The next time you have a thought... let it go.”- Ron White

# Causes and Risk Factors of Depression

Depression is one of the most common mental health conditions in the United States. It can affect people of nearly any age, background, or life circumstance. While the exact cause is not always clear, depression is typically influenced by a combination of factors rather than a single trigger. These may include genetic vulnerability, changes in brain chemistry, stressful or traumatic life events, chronic medical conditions, and lifestyle factors such as sleep patterns, substance use, or ongoing stress.

## Genetics

Someone with a genetic vulnerability may develop depression after significant stress, while someone without that vulnerability might not.

Genetics can play a meaningful role in depression, though they are only one part of a much larger picture that includes environment, life experiences, personality, and coping skills.

### 1. Family History Increases Risk

Research shows that depression tends to run in families. If a first-degree relative (parent or sibling) has experienced major depression, your risk is higher compared to someone without that family history. However, genetics increase vulnerability—they do not guarantee that someone will develop depression.

### 2. Multiple Genes Are Involved

There is no single “depression gene.” Instead, many genes contribute small effects that influence:

- Brain chemistry (such as serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine regulation)
- Stress response systems
- Emotional regulation
- Sleep and appetite patterns

These genetic variations can make some individuals more sensitive to stress or more prone to mood disturbances.

### 3. Gene–Environment Interaction

One of the most important concepts is gene–environment interaction. Genetics may increase susceptibility, but environmental stressors often trigger symptoms. For example:

- Trauma
- Chronic stress
- Loss or grief
- Substance use
- Medical illness



## **Stress Response & Brain Function**

Genetics can influence how the body responds to stress. Some individuals have a more reactive stress system (HPA axis), meaning their bodies produce stronger or longer-lasting stress responses, which can increase depression risk over time.

## **Epigenetics**

Epigenetics refers to how life experiences can “turn on” or “turn off” certain genes. Trauma, chronic stress, or neglect can alter gene expression without changing DNA itself. The encouraging part is that positive experiences—therapy, medication, social support, lifestyle changes—can also influence gene expression in protective ways.

# Important Takeaway

**Genetics create predisposition, not destiny. Having a family history of depression does not mean someone will develop it. Protective factors such as:**

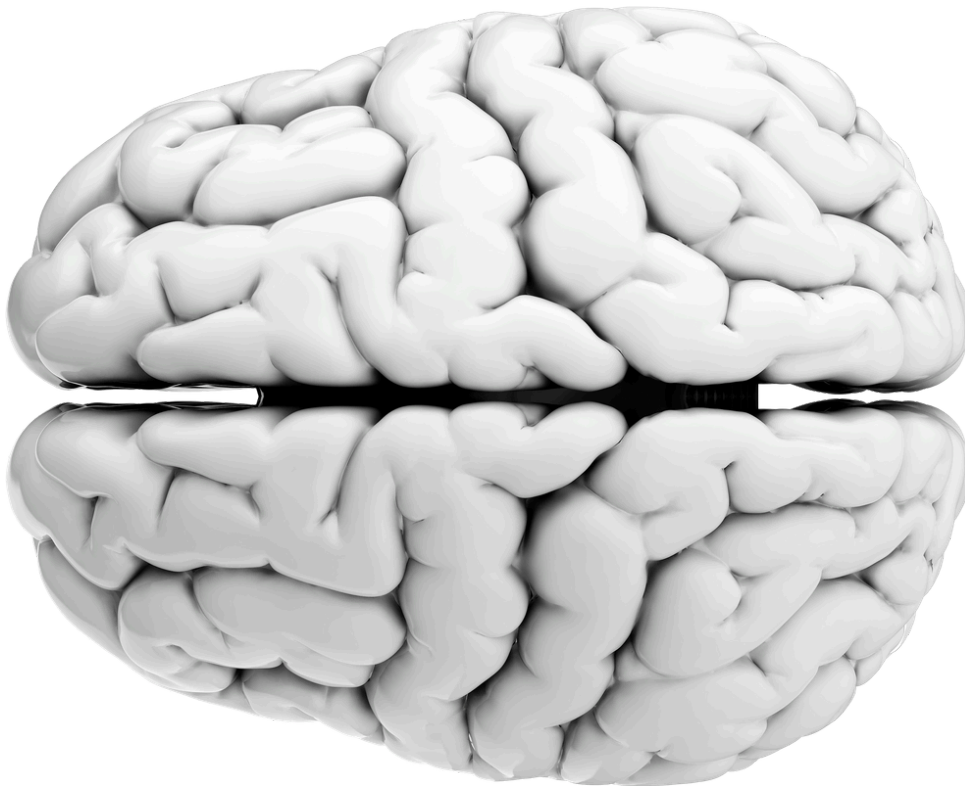
- **Strong social support**
- **Healthy coping skills**
- **Early intervention**
- **Therapy (CBT, DBT, etc.)**
- **Medication when appropriate**
- **Regular sleep, exercise, and nutrition**



# Brain and Body Causes of Depression

## Understanding the Biological Roots of a Complex Condition

Depression is often described as a “mood disorder,” but it is much more than persistent sadness. It is a whole-body condition influenced by intricate interactions between the brain, nervous system, hormones, immune system, and overall physical health. Understanding the biological contributors to depression can reduce stigma and empower people to seek appropriate treatment.



## The Brain's Role in Depression

### 1. Neurotransmitters: The Brain's Chemical Messengers

Neurotransmitters are chemicals that allow brain cells to communicate. Three commonly associated with depression include:

- Serotonin – Influences mood, sleep, and appetite
- Dopamine – Affects motivation, pleasure, and reward
- Norepinephrine – Impacts alertness and stress response

When these systems become dysregulated, individuals may experience symptoms such as low mood, fatigue, irritability, poor concentration, and loss of interest in activities.

However, depression is not simply a “chemical imbalance.” It involves broader network disruptions in how brain circuits process stress, reward, and emotion.

# The Brain's Role in Depression

## 2. Brain Structure and Function

Brain imaging studies show changes in specific areas among people experiencing depression:

- Prefrontal Cortex – Responsible for decision-making and emotional regulation; may show decreased activity.
- Amygdala – Processes fear and emotional responses; may be overactive.
- Hippocampus – Involved in memory and stress regulation; chronic stress may shrink its volume over time.

These changes can influence how a person interprets events, regulates emotions, and responds to stress.

## 3. Stress and the HPA Axis

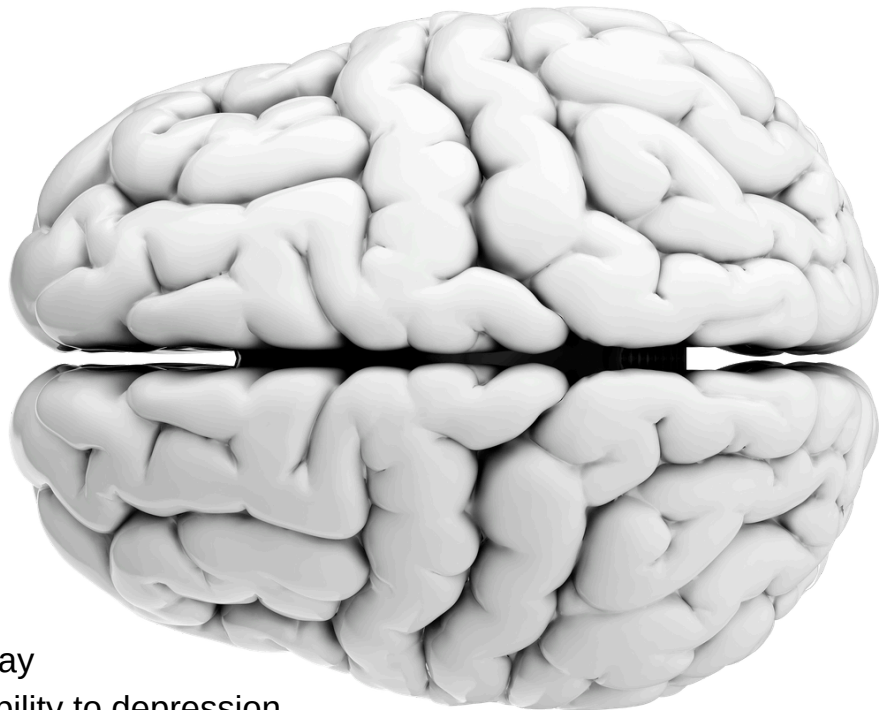
The hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis governs the body's stress response.

When activated repeatedly by chronic stress or trauma, it increases cortisol levels.

Long-term elevated cortisol can:

- Disrupt sleep
- Suppress immune function
- Impair concentration
- Contribute to emotional exhaustion

Over time, this stress response system may become dysregulated, increasing vulnerability to depression.



## Hormonal balance

### Hormonal Changes Can Also Contribute

Hormonal shifts can significantly impact mood. Examples include:

- Postpartum hormonal changes
- Thyroid disorders
- Perimenopause and menopause
- Testosterone changes in men
- Adrenal dysfunction

Even mild thyroid imbalance can mimic or worsen depressive symptoms.

# The Brain's Role in Depression

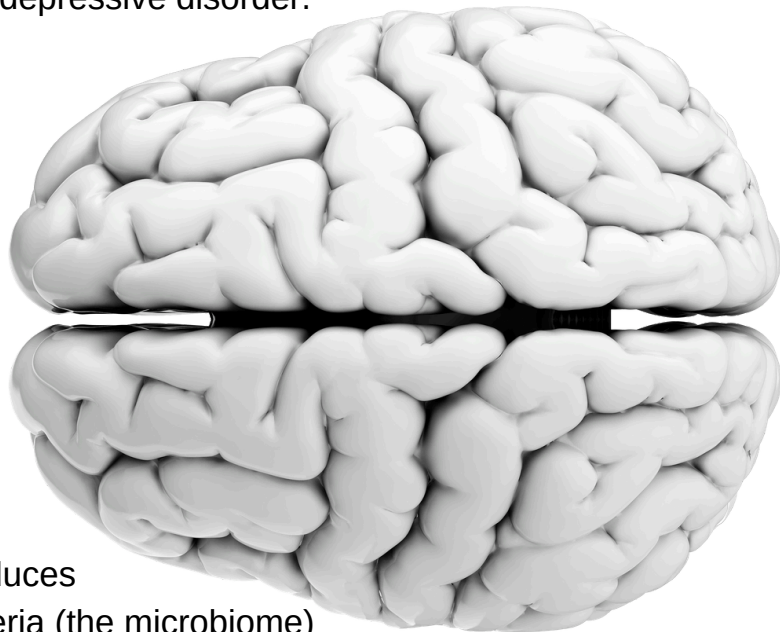
## 3. Inflammation and the Immune System

Research increasingly links depression to chronic inflammation. Elevated inflammatory markers have been found in some individuals with major depressive disorder.

Inflammation may:

- Affect neurotransmitter production
- Alter brain signaling
- Increase fatigue and low motivation
- Contribute to “brain fog”

This connection helps explain why depression often co-occurs with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, heart disease, and autoimmune disorders.



## 4. Gut-Brain Connection

The gut contains millions of nerve cells and produces many neurotransmitters. Disruptions in gut bacteria (the microbiome) may influence mood regulation.

Poor diet, chronic stress, antibiotics, and illness can affect gut health, which may in turn impact emotional well-being.

## 5. Sleep Disruption

Sleep and depression are closely intertwined. Chronic insomnia alters brain chemistry, impairs emotional regulation, and increases stress hormones. At the same time, depression itself disrupts sleep architecture, creating a cycle that worsens symptoms.



## Chronic Illness and Depression

Medical conditions that increase risk include:

- Chronic pain disorders
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Neurological disorders
- Cancer

Living with chronic illness affects brain chemistry, inflammation levels, energy, and identity – all of which may contribute to depression.

# Integrated Care

## Health for All Treatment: Addressing Brain and Body Together

Effective treatment often includes:

- Psychotherapy (CBT, trauma-informed care, interpersonal therapy)
- Medication when appropriate
- Sleep stabilization
- Nutritional support
- Exercise and movement
- Stress reduction practices
- Management of underlying medical conditions

Integrated care models — where medical and behavioral health providers collaborate — are especially beneficial for individuals experiencing both physical and emotional symptoms.



# Understanding Fear of Abandonment

Fear of abandonment is a deep emotional concern that important people in your life will leave, reject, or withdraw from you. While many people dislike rejection, abandonment fear is more intense, persistent, and often rooted in earlier life experiences.

## What Is Fear of Abandonment?

Fear of abandonment involves heightened sensitivity to perceived rejection, distance, or changes in relationships. It can show up as:

- Constant worry that someone will leave
- Overanalyzing tone, texts, or behavior
- Feeling anxious when a partner needs space
- Strong emotional reactions to minor conflicts
- Difficulty trusting reassurance

## Where Does It Come From?

Fear of abandonment often develops from early experiences such as:

- Childhood neglect or inconsistent caregiving
- Divorce or loss of a parent
- Emotional unavailability from caregivers
- Trauma or abuse
- Repeated relationship instability

When early attachment needs are not consistently met, the nervous system can become wired to expect loss or rejection.



# How it Affects Relationships

**Fear of abandonment can influence behavior in several ways:**

**1. Clinginess or Overdependence**

Seeking constant reassurance, needing frequent contact, or struggling when a partner is unavailable.

**2. Testing Behaviors**

Pushing someone away to see if they will come back.

**3. Jealousy or Hypervigilance**

Monitoring social media, reading into small changes, assuming betrayal.

**4. Emotional Reactivity**

Intense anxiety, anger, or sadness during minor relational stress.

**5. Avoidance**

Keeping emotional distance to prevent being hurt.

Ironically, some of these protective behaviors can strain relationships and increase the risk of conflict.



## The Role of Attachment Styles

Fear of abandonment is commonly associated with anxious attachment. Individuals with anxious attachment may:

- Crave closeness but fear rejection
- Feel preoccupied with relationship security
- Experience heightened emotional responses to perceived distance

Understanding attachment patterns can reduce shame and increase self-awareness.

# When to Seek Therapy

**Therapy may be especially helpful if fear of abandonment:**

- Causes repeated relationship conflict
- Leads to panic, depression, or self-harm behaviors
- Is rooted in trauma
- Creates intense emotional swings

**Approaches that can help include:**

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
- EMDR for attachment trauma
- Attachment-focused therapy



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