

Non-medication options for treatment of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)

CBT is a form of therapy that helps individuals change negative patterns of thinking and behaviour. It focuses on identifying and challenging negative thought patterns and behaviours, and replacing them with positive ones.

Our favourite resources are:

1. Mood Gym - An online program that provides training in CBT and consists of five interactive modules. These include information, interactive exercises, workbooks to record thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and quizzes with personalized feedback. moodgym.com.au
2. Kelty's Key - Work through these free courses at your own pace online. There are courses for anxiety, insomnia, depression, panic, chronic pain, grief, substance use and family support. www.keltyskey.com
3. MindShift - An App with interactive cognitive-based tools to help you reorient your thinking, and behavioural strategies to help you take action and make lasting positive change. www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt
4. Mind Over Mood - a self-help book using evidence-based methods that is frequently prescribed by psychiatrists. It is available at many bookstores and on Amazon.
5. CBT Skills Group - Virtual CBT Skills Groups for BC Residents are open to all BC residents. The course is designed for adult patients (17.5 years and up) who want to learn practical tools to improve their mental health. All groups are facilitated by trained physicians. cbtskills.ca

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Mindfulness

Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment in a non-judgmental way. It can help reduce anxiety and depression by reducing rumination and increasing awareness of negative thoughts and feelings.

Here are some tips:

1. Start with a daily mindfulness practice: Dedicate a few minutes each day to focus on your breath and the sensations in your body. Try to be fully present in the moment, without judgment.
2. Incorporate mindfulness into daily activities: Bring mindfulness to tasks like washing dishes, cooking, or taking a walk. Pay attention to your senses, the sensations in your body, and the present moment.
3. Practice mindfulness meditation: There are many different types of mindfulness meditations, including body scan, sitting meditation, and walking meditation. Find one that works for you and stick with it.
4. Focus on the present moment: When you find yourself getting caught up in worries about the future or regrets about the past, bring your attention back to the present moment. Focus on your breath and the sensations in your body.

Remember, mindfulness is a lifelong practice, and the more you do it, the more benefits you'll experience. Be patient and kind to yourself: Mindfulness can be challenging, especially if you're new to it. Be patient and gentle with yourself, and don't judge yourself for your thoughts or distractions.

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Exercise

Exercise has been shown to be effective in treating symptoms of depression and anxiety. Regular exercise can improve mood, increase feelings of wellbeing, and reduce stress and anxiety. Try to get 30-60 minutes of moderately vigorous exercise per day.

Diet

Eating a healthy diet can help improve symptoms of depression and anxiety. Eating a diet that is high in fibre, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein, and low in processed foods and sugar, can help improve mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety.

Sleep protection and hygiene

Getting enough sleep and maintaining good sleep hygiene can help improve mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. This includes establishing a regular sleep routine, avoiding screens before bedtime, and creating a sleep-conducive environment. CBT for insomnia can be helpful. Please see Terra Nova's Insomnia Resources handout for details.

Social supports

Having a strong social support system can help individuals manage symptoms of depression and anxiety. This includes spending time with family and friends, participating in group activities, and joining support groups.

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Behavioural Activation Therapy (BAT)

BAT is a form of therapy that focuses on increasing engagement in enjoyable and meaningful activities. It helps individuals with depression by breaking the cycle of inactivity and low mood.

1. Identify activities that bring pleasure and satisfaction: Start by making a list of activities that you enjoy or used to enjoy. This can include hobbies, exercise, socializing, etc.
2. Gradually increase activities: Start with small, manageable activities and gradually increase the level of difficulty as you become more comfortable.
3. Set achievable goals: Set realistic goals for yourself and prioritize activities that bring the most pleasure and satisfaction.
4. Reward yourself: Reinforce positive behaviour by rewarding yourself after completing activities. This can help increase the likelihood of repeating the behaviour in the future.

Counselling

You can access counselling services if you have extended medical benefits without a referral. If you do not have coverage for counselling, please speak to your provider for low cost or government covered options.

It's important to note that these non-medication options may not work for everyone, and that it's best to work with a mental health professional to determine the best treatment plan for your individual needs.

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Substance Avoidance

Substance use can contribute to or worsen your symptoms:

1. Tobacco and nicotine: Nicotine, the addictive substance in tobacco, can trigger changes in the brain that lead to mood swings, irritability, and feelings of tension.
2. Caffeine: While caffeine is often consumed to increase alertness and energy, it can also have negative effects on mood. For some people, caffeine can trigger anxiety symptoms, such as rapid heart rate, sweating, and nervousness. Overconsumption of caffeine can also interfere with sleep, which is important for maintaining good mental health.
3. Marijuana: While marijuana is often used to treat various symptoms of mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, it can also have the opposite effect in some people. For some, marijuana use can increase symptoms of anxiety, paranoia, and panic. Additionally, long-term use of marijuana has been associated with an increased risk of depression.
4. Other substances: Substance abuse, including the use of alcohol, opioids, and other drugs, can also have negative effects on mental health. Substance abuse can lead to a range of physical and psychological health problems, including depression, anxiety, and mood swings.

In general, stopping substance use can help improve mental health by reducing the negative effects of these substances on the brain and body. Additionally, quitting can help individuals focus on other treatments and strategies for managing depression and anxiety, such as therapy, exercise, and healthy eating.

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