



**Helping reduce the disparities  
to proper treatment for anxiety  
and depression**



## When running late, facing a project deadline or an exam, anxiety and stress can be normal.

Feeling down after a disappointment or loss is also natural. But sometimes, feelings of sadness and worry are signs of a more serious health condition. Especially when they start to impact how we live our lives.

Many people do not know how to recognize symptoms of anxiety and depressive disorders. They might also be unaware of the treatments available to them, and that treatment works.



### **Anxiety disorder**

Excessive, persistent or all-consuming feelings of worry and fear that interfere with daily life.



### **Depression**

Persistently depressed mood, feelings of sadness or lack of interest in activities that affect sleep, appetite, concentration and more.



**This lack of awareness can impact some groups more than others. Certain racial, ethnic, gender and LGBTQ+ individuals often struggle to get mental health care.**

**The American Psychiatric Association (APA) says members of these groups may encounter cultural stigma, discrimination and language barriers. They may be misunderstood and underrepresented among health care providers.<sup>1</sup>**

The APA fact sheet for mental health in diverse population highlights a survey that shows the gaps in access. It found just 22% of Asian Americans with any mental illness were receiving care services. For African American and Hispanic Americans, only about one in three get the care they need. That's compared to about half of white people.<sup>2</sup>

The APA offers more information on several different populations. For example, African Americans are less likely to receive care consistent with guidelines, or treatments aligned with evidence-based recommendations. They are less likely to use prescription medications and outpatient services and more likely to use inpatient or emergency room care.

At Optum, we realize that many underserved people may reach out for help, not quite sure of what they need. We are finding ways to provide (or offer) a larger welcome mat and to make sure the door to quality care swings open equally and for all.

Optum is training providers to meet people where they are in their health journey. We're focused on the whole person and helping providers understand how to go beyond physical care and address all the needs of the people they treat.

We are also working to reduce wait times for access to providers and to lessen the distance people need to travel to pick up medications.

We're creating pathways to care and inviting people to learn more about available treatment and support systems, recognizing symptoms and feeling comfortable reaching out for help.

**Our efforts are focused on helping each person get more immediate help — even if they don't know they need it or have the words to express it.**



# Knowing when help is needed

**One of the outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a rising level of stress among people.**

The effects are unequal. In a survey from the Commonwealth Fund, Hispanic Americans and African Americans people, women and people with lower incomes reported higher stress, anxiety and sadness rates due to problems from COVID-19 than their counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

The circumstances may cause some to miss a behavioral health signal. For example, people experiencing anxiety and depression might think, “This is just because of COVID. This is because life has turned upside down.”

With the pandemic fading, some might expect symptoms of depression and anxiety to fade as well. If the symptoms remain, they might not realize what’s happening or try to keep their experience to themselves.

Now more than ever, understanding our emotional and mental health means making a realistic assessment of what we’re feeling and experiencing.

## Is it depression or anxiety? What to look for

**There is no universal cause of depression or anxiety.**

There are also no specific physical tests. In some cases, a doctor may conduct tests to rule out some medical conditions with similar symptoms, like thyroid problems. In general, a diagnosis comes from an analysis of symptoms and understanding the person’s history. The best way for a clinician to know what is happening is to listen to the individual tell their story. This helps guide the formulation and treatment plan.

Depression has warning signs, such as a desire to isolate oneself or overpowering negative thoughts. Anxiety can

## How does depression feel?

- Weight or appetite changes
- Anger and irritability
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Lack of concentration
- Loss of interest in normal day-to-day activities
- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Feeling drained, exhausted, sluggish and tired
- Increased physical complaints such as back pains, headaches, stomach pain or muscle aches
- Reckless behavior such as substance abuse or compulsive gambling
- Self-loathing



Source: [Optum Perks](#)



manifest as phobias and fears, physical feelings of intense stress or powerful worry about being around other people. But we're all unique, and depression and anxiety can look and feel different for each of us.

Anxiety and depression can be connected. They can be the result of someone's biology, personality, social standing, community or experiences. Certain groups face more risk factors. For example, discrimination and poverty, which disproportionately impact people of color, are stressors. These can be not only short-term, but also chronic stressors. Neither condition is the result of any weakness or inability to cope.

Nearly everyone experiences some symptoms of anxiety or depression on occasion. But when patterns emerge and symptoms start to impact your life and choices, it's a sign that you should find help. That can begin with finding a partner who can help you explore your symptoms.

## Finding mental health support

**Some might assume that they need to find a counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist to get mental health support.**

But a family physician or **primary care doctor** can help. The American Academy of Family Physicians points to research that shows two-thirds of patients with depression receive treatment for their depression in the primary care setting.<sup>4</sup>

However, not everyone has a primary care doctor. In 2017, Fierce Healthcare reported on a survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that found 28% of U.S. men and 17% of women lacked a personal doctor. Analysis of the survey showed even larger percentages of ethnic groups reported no primary care physician.<sup>5</sup>

Working with a physician to access types of therapy and medication can be crucial. This is especially true for people who are experiencing more acute forms of behavioral health issues.

## How does anxiety feel?

- Stomach pain, nausea or digestive trouble
- Headache
- Insomnia or other sleep issues
- Weakness or fatigue
- Rapid breathing or shortness of breath
- Pounding heart or increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Muscle tension or pain



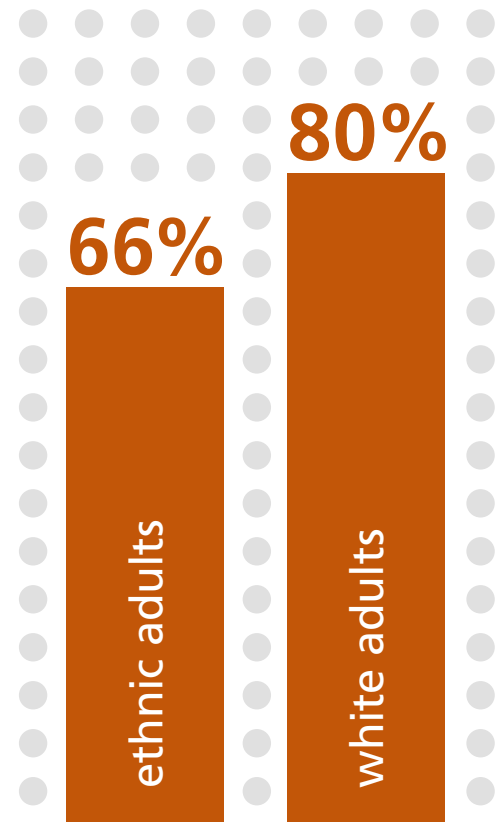
Source: [Optum Perks](#)

For people who aren't yet connected to a primary care doctor, there are ways to find help. It might be available through an employer. Some workplace benefits programs offer **employee assistance programs (EAPs)**. These may provide free and confidential counseling or referrals for people dealing with mental and emotional well-being issues.

**Virtual health care** also provides new paths to finding mental health support. There are some helplines that are answered 24/7. Video and phone-based appointments accommodate privacy and provide options for people who do not have flexible schedules or transportation.

There are also **apps** that provide on-demand help with stress, anxiety and depression, with features such as relaxation or meditation techniques, daily mood tracking, community support and personalized progress measures. Some allow you to search for and connect with care providers or complete online therapy and assessments. Some include coaching and tips for self-care.

Across all these avenues to care, Optum is working to build guided experiences. When someone finds an app or requests help through an EAP, they can share their struggles and the severity of their symptoms. Then we can help provide evidence-based information that will lead people to the right care to meet their specific needs, and ultimately reduce gaps in access to mental health care services. Everyone deserves the chance to feel better and live a healthier life.



**Adults with a regular health care provider<sup>6</sup>**

Sources:

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