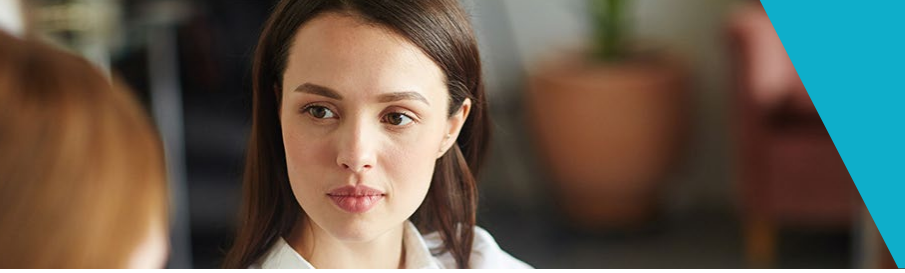

Recognising Early Signs of Stress, Anxiety and Depression

Early Intervention

Caring for our mental wellbeing is just as important as looking after our physical health. Learning to recognise the early signs of stress, anxiety and depression – both in ourselves and in the people around us, can be invaluable. Spotting these signs early allows us to take action before things become overwhelming. Please note: the signs listed are not exhaustive and mental ill-health can show up in different ways for different people.

Stress

Stress often shows up in the body as much as in the mind. You might notice difficulty sleeping, frequent headaches or stomach problems, or a sense of constant tiredness. Emotionally, stress can make you feel irritable, easily overwhelmed or unable to focus.

Signs of stress may include:

- Trouble sleeping or unexplained fatigue
- Headaches, muscle tension or stomach upsets
- Irritability or mood swings
- Withdrawing from usual activities

Anxiety

Anxiety can feel different. Many people describe it as a cycle of racing thoughts or constant worry that is hard to control. This may be accompanied by physical sensations such as a racing heart, sweating, or a tight chest. Anxiety can also lead to restlessness, trouble relaxing and avoiding certain situations.

Signs of anxiety may include:

- Persistent or uncontrollable worry
- Feeling 'on edge' or restless
- Physical symptoms such as a pounding heart or shortness of breath
- Difficulty relaxing, even in safe situations

Depression

Depression often appears as a persistent low mood or sense of hopelessness. You might find it hard to enjoy activities that once brought you pleasure or notice changes in your sleep and appetite. Everyday tasks may feel exhausting, and some people experience feelings of guilt or worthlessness.

Signs of depression may include:

- Feeling sad, flat or hopeless most of the time
- Loss of interest in hobbies or socialising
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Thoughts of guilt, worthlessness or self-harm

If you notice these patterns in yourself or someone you care about, the most important step is to reach out. Talking with a trusted friend, family member or colleague can make a difference. Healthy coping strategies such as exercise, mindfulness, journaling or taking time to rest can also help. If symptoms continue for more than two weeks, or if they begin to interfere with daily life, it's a good idea to seek professional support.

1300 970 036
info@easec.com.au
easec.com.au

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