

Dr. Kathy McCoy



Q & A: Troubling Feelings

Q. My friend says she thinks I'm depressed. But I'm not sad. I just want to sleep a lot.

A. Depression doesn't always feel like sadness. Instead, you may be irritable and snappish.

You may not find pleasure in things you usually enjoy. You may be lacking motivation, thinking "What's the use...?" And you may be sleeping a lot, finding it hard to get out of bed. There can be many reasons for depression. Sometimes you can easily link it to a situation – a romantic breakup, the loss of a job or difficulty changing something in your life that you know needs changing. Sometimes, though, depression seems to come from within for no reason you can easily identify.

Q. Is anxiety just a normal part of life or is it a problem? I'm kind of an anxious person overall and usually it's not a problem except for when I get a panic attack.

A. Anxiety can be part of all our times. There are times when anxiety is normal, even advantageous when it signals a need for caution in a dangerous situation. But anxiety can also limit your life if it keeps you from doing things you want and need to do. It's one thing to feel anxious before a speech or a presentation at work. It's quite another to not be able to perform work tasks, to socialize or even to leave your home due to anxiety.

Q. Is seeing a therapist always necessary? Can't you just work things out on your own? Or take medication?

A. When anxiety or depression is mild and/or linked to a specific situation, there are things you can do to help alleviate your distress. Talking with people you love and trust can help. So can good self-care: getting out of bed, taking a shower, eating healthy foods and in moderation, getting daily exercise. You can interrupt – and decrease the strength of – anxious thoughts by saying "Stop!" and then engaging in a distraction: listening to music, taking a walk, texting a friend or snuggling with a beloved pet. If this doesn't help as much as you'd like, it may be time to talk with a therapist. Ask your doctor for a referral or check out the Psychology Today Therapist Finder for licensed mental health professionals in your area. These days many of these work online, doing video sessions, so you could choose anyone in your state who looks like a good match for you!

Q. What about medication?

A. Medication can be helpful when depression or anxiety lingers despite your best efforts for self-help and getting psychotherapy. Medications can help you in both areas – self-care and making the best use of talk therapy – when your depression or anxiety is severe.

Dr. Kathy McCoy is an award-winning author, a journalist and a blogger as well as a psychotherapist. Her book, *We Don't Talk Anymore*, is available at Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.