

A Look at the Family Tree

Depression, anxiety and mood disorders tend to run in families. In reviewing one's emotional family history it is important to note that the stigma of mental illness often causes families to be unwilling to admit emotional problems or seek professional help. As a result, familial mental health issues may not be addressed or identified. Diagnosis and treatment of mood disorders has improved dramatically during recent years and the public is now better educated about symptoms and identification.

You may never know for sure, but looking at behavior and symptoms in your family tree can help you determine if undiagnosed depression, mood disorders or anxiety were possible issues. Having only one or two of some of these symptoms does not necessarily indicate the presence of anxiety or depression in your family history. However, combinations of certain symptoms or a number of different symptoms increase the likelihood of undiagnosed mental health issues. Discuss your family history with a counselor for clarification.

Possible indicators of mental health issues in family history:

Depression and Chronic Sadness:

- Chronic sadness
- Difficulty sleeping or excessive periods of sleep
- Addictions, excessive alcohol and drug use
- Migraines or frequent headaches
- Frequently in bed during waking hours
- Frequent physical complaints
- Unexplained hospitalization
- "Nervous breakdown"
- Suicide or suicidal thoughts or gestures
- Eating disorders, weight changes, overweight or underweight
- Social withdrawal
- Poor communication, relationship difficulties
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Chronic irritability
- Postpartum depression
- Fear of making decisions
- Loss of interest in activities that were previously enjoyable

Anxiety:

- Feelings of panic, fear and uneasiness
- Persistent worry
- Problems sleeping
- Irritability or agitation

- Inability to be still; restlessness
- Inability to be calm
- Numbness or tingling in the hands or feet
- Heart palpitations
- Intrusive thoughts, mind racing
- Unable to let go of negative thoughts
- Inability to concentrate
- Catastrophic thinking
- Tendency to anticipate or worry excessively about negative outcomes not supported by circumstances
- Intense need for order or control
- Hoarding

Bipolar Disorder: (Symptoms in addition to those listed under depression)

- Excessive or explosive anger
- Violent and/or destructive behavior
- Inability to focus; attention deficit issues
- Criminal acts and/or incarceration
- Unpredictability, mood changes
- Pressured speech; constant, rapid talking
- Unusual sensitivity to medication
- Insomnia, reduced need for sleep
- Workaholism, excessive work
- Grandiose ideas for business or money ventures
- Perpetrator of child or spousal abuse
- Inflated self-esteem
- Charismatic, extremely outgoing personality; grandiosity
- Expansive mood; unrealistic expectations