

'MIND Your Health' Webinar Episode 2: Depression & Anxiety **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

- 1. Where and how can we access certified Psychologist or Psychotherapist? What would be the estimated cost?**

There are psychologists in both the public and private sectors. Depending on where they are based, costs can vary accordingly. For public sector and subsidised fees, you can consider consulting a polyclinic, restructured hospitals and selected family service centres.

- 2. What are the nutritional needs for brain health? Does a lack of essential nutrition affect brain health?**

Choosing the right foods to eat is important, not just for brain health, but for your total health and well-being. There have been recent scientific studies that have found a correlation between a diet high in refined sugars and a worsening of symptoms of mood disorders, such as depression.

Quoting from one scientific paper, people who consume “traditional” diets, like the Mediterranean diet or a traditional Japanese diet seem to have a lower risk of depression compared to those who eat a “western” diet. It could be that these “traditional diet” tend to be higher in vegetables, fruits, unprocessed grains, fish, seafood, and lower in processed and refined sugars. Certainly, more studies can be done for this topic.

- 3. How do we address the issue of intergenerational mental health in a sustainable supported manner?**

This is an issue which is becoming more recognised globally. It requires joint efforts between the community, schools, healthcare providers and policy makers as well. One way we can take a step in the right direction is by promoting awareness and education on how parental mental health can affect their children's mental health. Reducing stigma on seeking help and increasing accessibility of mental health treatment is key.

- 4. What are the available resources for a Full-time National Serviceman (NSF) suffering from anxiety and depression?**

It is important for the NSF to seek help from his Camp Medical Officer who may refer him to a specialist for assessment. Alternatively, he may also seek help from the Polyclinic or General Practitioner for an initial assessment.

5. **Besides medication and professional therapy, are there alternative therapies for those suffering from depression and anxiety?**

Apart from medication and therapy, having an active and balanced lifestyle is important as well. Physical activities, mindfulness, music, positive relationships with people and animals are some examples of things you may explore.

6. **What are the available resources for healthcare professionals (HCP) besides going through the public sector? (e.g. social workers, therapists, etc)**

Burnout in HCP is an important issue. Perceived stigma may dissuade HCP from seeking help in the public sector. Those who have concerns may instead seek help from the private sector – General Practitioners, Psychiatrists, Psychologists.

7. **What are the avenues to report workplace discrimination or harassment against those suffering from mental illness?**

You may refer to one of the latest advisories published on the MOM website (<https://www.mom.gov.sg/covid-19/tripartite-advisory-on-mental-well-being-at-workplaces>). Employers do need to support individual employees' mental health and foster a safe and trusting work environment as it will certainly help with mental wellness.

You can report discrimination or workplace harassment at <https://www.tal.sg/tafep/Contact-Us>. Patients should also discuss their mood issues with their mental healthcare providers to see if there is anything else that may help.

8. **Is there a link between genetics and mental health conditions?**

Yes, it is recognised that many mental health conditions tend to run in families, suggesting potential genetic roots. These include conditions such as schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder.

However, it is important to note that the transmission is not 100%. Even if the parent suffered from a mental illness, it does not mean that the child would definitely get it too. Scientists are still trying to understand how genetic factors interact with other factors such as the environment in causing mental health conditions. Even if there is no apparent family history of mental health condition, there is still a risk of a person developing it in his/her lifetime.

9. Is the individual who is diagnosed with a mental illness required to declare their condition during a job interview/employment?

You do not need to declare your mental health condition. You may refer to one of the latest advisories published on the MOM website (<https://www.mom.gov.sg/covid-19/tripartite-advisory-on-mental-well-being-at-workplaces>), especially paragraph 13 which states that:

“The Tripartite Guidelines on Fair Employment Practices (TGFEPP) states that companies should not ask job applicants to declare personal information, which includes their mental health condition, unless it is a job-related requirement.”

10. Are mental health issues more prevalent in lower income families? How can we better support people from lower-income families with mental health issue?

Individuals from lower income families experience similar mental health issues as those who are not. They may however experience stressors from practical issues like finances, childcare support, employment – these are things that we look into and provide support to reduce their burden.

11. Are there any organisations that provide support to jobseekers or those having difficulties coping at work due to anxiety and depression?

If there are other factors affecting your ability to cope at work (e.g. finances, family troubles, personal issues), we recommend that you consider approaching a Family Service Centre or Non-Government Organization (NGO) for counselling. It may be worthwhile.

Speaking to a counsellor who can evaluate your stress management and work with you on any existing challenges you may have. Exploring those issues with a trained counsellor can sometimes bring about new perspectives and help relieve stress. Where possible and with your consent, counsellors can sometimes liaise with the workplace on how better to support you.

12. Are elderly people who are living alone at higher risk of developing depression? How can we persuade them to seek medical treatment? What are the helplines available?

Being alone can be a risk factor for depression and anxiety. We recommend for the elderly to engage with community partners, e.g. Senior Activity Centres, Family Service Centres, if they are resistant to seek medical treatment immediately. You may be able to find a service provider at the AIC care locator website.

13. Can one recover from post-partum depression and can it develop into manic depressive disorder?

Post-partum depression can occur in 10-13% of women who have delivered. Post-partum psychosis can occur up to about 1% of cases. This may include "manic" symptoms such as pervasive elated mood, increased thought, feelings of wellness and poor sleep and raised energy. In certain cases, more severe symptoms like psychosis (losing touch of reality, hearing voices, feeling paranoid) may occur.

Not all cases of post-partum depression will evolve into a post-partum psychosis.

14. Does adverse childhood experience(s) affect an individual's mental health?

Adverse Childhood Experience can result in an increased risk of mental health issues in the individual.

15. What should we do if the individual does not want to visit the doctor? How can we persuade them?

If someone is currently resisting medical treatment from doctors or hospitals, you can encourage counselling. Family Service Centres and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) like Singapore Association of Mental Health (SAMH) / Silver Ribbon / Clarity Singapore do provide counselling. Do check out these resources if you wish to speak to someone.

16. Can chronic illness cause depression and anxiety?

Chronic illness is known to cause depression and anxiety in patients. Sometimes, this can occur in severe or stressful acute illness too.

17. Are there any platforms to help individuals with mental illnesses find jobs in organisations that are mental health friendly?

You can discuss this matter with your mental health provider who may have contacts with different organisations that are able to help with your future employment.

At IMH, our occupational therapy department provides training, and a JobClub that helps to link patients up with supportive employers, taking into account their skills, training needs, qualifications etc. However, specific job openings will also depend on their availability in the various industries.

18. How do we determine if the elderly is suffering from depression, dementia or both?

There are similarities in symptoms of depression and dementia. Patients with dementia can develop depression, and patients with severe depression can sometimes present with dementia-like symptoms, such as memory issues.

Before we can properly treat the elderly patient, we would first need to do a proper assessment, which includes a thorough history and detailed physical & mental examination. We also need to interview caregivers for a longitudinal history. Very often, we would need to do investigations such as blood tests to find out whether there are any medical illnesses which may have contributed to the symptoms as well.

19. What are the various community interventions for persons with depression? What can Singapore do to better deinstitutionalise care of Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)?

Family Service Centres and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) like Singapore Association of Mental Health (SAMH) / Silver Ribbon / Clarity Singapore do provide counselling. Encouraging people to seek help from the community instead of specialists for mild symptoms is a good way to deinstitutionalise care.

20. Is the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) tool useful for screening for our local population?

Yes, IMH do use it sometimes!

21. What kind of exercises can help with both depression and anxiety? Does deep breathing help?

Exercising in general is useful (anything from swimming, to jogging, martial arts, yoga etc). Deep breathing also helps. You may check out www.mindline.sg and MindFi app for more information.

22. Why is antihistamine used for depression?

Antihistamines may be used as a sedative for sleep problems or anxiety.

23. Can depression and anxiety lead to narcissistic traits? If so, what kind of treatment is available for narcissism?

Narcissism is part of a person's personality and usually related to childhood experiences. Depression and anxiety do not generally lead to narcissism. Therapy would be a possible treatment to consider.

24. What can you do to help an individual suffering from mental illness but refuses to seek treatment?

Apart from seeking counselling from Family Service Centre and other Non-Government Organization, if there are concerns about risk of suicide, you can call SOS or the IMH Hotline. If there are urgent concerns, you can bring the person to the A&E of General Hospitals or the Institute of Mental Health.

25. When should I consult a Counsellor or Psychologist?

If the symptoms you are experiencing starts to affect your functioning, whether at work, at home, in school or in your social life, it is probably time to see a counsellor or a psychologist. There are also general practitioners and polyclinic doctors who are trained to treat and manage mild to moderate conditions. You may be able to find a service provider at the AIC care locator website found in the Resource Material.

26. Is it possible to overcome Panic Disorder without medications?

Depending on the severity of symptoms, therapy alone may help to overcome the condition. You should discuss these with your psychologist and see how he/she can help you address the issues. Sometimes, the symptoms are too disabling and may cause dysfunction in your socio-occupational functioning. Symptoms can also interfere with psychotherapy. In such instance, medications may be necessary to help reduce or remove the symptoms.

27. How do Doctors or Psychiatrists typically weigh the benefits of medication versus the side effects?

We do discuss the effects and potential adverse effects with patients before starting them on medications. We usually inform them (and their caregivers when applicable) about the common and more serious side effects. However, not everyone will develop the same side effects to the same medications.

There are those who can tolerate high doses of medications without any side effects at all, but in other similar patients, they can get drowsy with even half or a quarter of the dose.

As doctors, we really appreciate honest feedback from patients about the effects and side effects of the treatment so that we can quickly make the adjustments.

28. What is the difference between psychotherapy and counselling?

Psychotherapy refers to more specific targeted therapies e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Dynamic Therapy, Schema Therapy. Counselling is a more general term and usually refers to supportive counselling.

29. How can a caregiver seek help if he/she needs someone to talk to?

We recognise the important roles that caregiver plays in supporting our patients. There is an organisation called “Caregiver Alliance” that provides training and support. You can read more about them via this link (<https://www.cal.org.sg>)

30. What would be your advice for individuals who wish to seek help but is concerned by the surrounding stigma?

The individual can try seeking help from community-based supports first as this may be more easily accessible and has less stigma attached then seeing a specialist immediately. In general, stigma needs to be addressed with more awareness and education.