

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE



Health Conditions Commonly Mistaken for Anxiety

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Many medical conditions produce symptoms that mimic anxiety disorder, such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, fatigue and dizziness. As a result, people may be misdiagnosed or be dealing with both conditions. These eight conditions can be commonly mistaken for anxiety:

1. **Hyperthyroidism**—An overactive thyroid speeds up metabolism, causing a fast heartbeat and nervousness. Tremors and unexplained weight loss can point toward the thyroid instead.
2. **Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS)**—Standing up too fast can trigger dizziness and a pounding heart. Symptoms flare with position changes, not with worry, when it is POTS.
3. **Inappropriate sinus tachycardia (IST)**—This is characterized by a persistently high resting heart rate that won't settle even at rest, unlike anxiety-driven spikes that ease once the trigger passes.
4. **Endometriosis**—Chronic pelvic pain and fatigue can raise stress levels that look like anxiety. Symptoms tied closely to the menstrual cycle can be a giveaway.
5. **Polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS, formerly PCOS)**—Hormonal swings can bring irritability and mood changes that mimic anxiety. Irregular cycles and elevated testosterone tell the real story.
6. **Inflammatory bowel disease (IBS)**—Chronic gut inflammation brings cramping and fatigue that can look like anxious tension. Blood in the stool signals something more.
7. **Adrenal insufficiency**—Low cortisol can cause fatigue and low blood pressure that may feel like panic. Salt cravings and skin darkening may point to another cause.
8. **Fibromyalgia**—Widespread pain and exhaustion often travel alongside real anxiety, making the two easy to tangle together. Tender points at specific spots help set it apart.

If you've received an anxiety disorder diagnosis but suspect something else may be occurring, consider a second opinion.

The Power of Sleep

On Nov. 1, clocks fall back an hour, and most people will treat it as a minor inconvenience or maybe an extra hour in bed. However, the time shift is also a good reminder that sleep is one of the most powerful tools for mental and physical health, and there are ways to make the most out of the extra hour.

Sleep isn't downtime. It's when the brain consolidates memories, clears out metabolic waste and regulates the hormones that control mood, appetite and stress response. Skimp on it, and the effects show up almost immediately through shorter tempers, foggier thinking and weaker impulse control. Sleep deprivation is also linked to higher rates of anxiety and depression. Poor sleep and poor mental health tend to feed each other in a loop that's hard to break.

Daylight saving time changes are a small but real disruption to that system. Shifting the clock, even by an hour, affects our circadian rhythm, the internal clock that governs when we feel alert or sleepy. It can take days for the body to adjust fully.

The following tips can help your mind and body adjust to the time change and protect your sleep:

- Try shifting wake time and bedtime by 15-20 minutes in the days before the switch rather than all at once.
- Get morning sunlight exposure (e.g., walk outside, open curtains or turn on indoor lights) to help reset your internal clock.
- Focus on building a consistent wind-down routine to help combat any seasonal mood changes triggered by darker evenings.

In addition, assess how you're doing with basic sleep hygiene (e.g., consistent sleep and wake times on weekdays and weekends, no large meals or alcohol before bed and no electronics before sleeping) and adjust as needed.

Sleep isn't a luxury or a sign of laziness; it's basic maintenance for a healthy mind. As the clocks change this fall, it's worth treating that gained hour as an invitation to protect the sleep you get. For more information on how to improve your sleep habits or to address sleep issues, contact your doctor today.

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