

# Stress, Anxiety and Depression



**D**r. Larry Lake is a licensed psychotherapist and the CEO of BayView Healthcare, as well as its parent organization, the St. Johns Welfare Federation.

*Lake says “as a local non-profit healthcare provider, we are excited about how this FORUM can help share the knowledge and expertise of the more than 288 healthcare professionals at BayView and across our continuum of care. In each issue we will address an area of interest to help consumers be even more informed about their health and wellness.”*

*This FORUM focuses on stress, anxiety and depression which affect millions of Americans every year. Depression and anxiety are both very treatable. As with many illnesses, early*

*treatment is more effective and helps prevent the likelihood of serious recurrences.*

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muscle tension. Some people may experience feeling shaky, weak or dizzy, a fast beating heart, headaches, feeling sick to your stomach, sleeping too much or too little, little to no appetite, diarrhea, or a tight feeling in your chest and throat.

### Behavioral Reactions

Anxiety can impact our ability to act or deal with every day situations effectively and with consistency. For instance, a co-worker requires you to explain to them several times on how to complete a task. Rather than your usual response of teaching in a supportive manner, you respond by raising your voice and stating “Again? Can’t you figure things out?”

**S**tress is something that we all experience in our everyday lives. It occurs when something causes a person to lose that feeling of “balance” in their life. When stress is experienced at an extreme level, it can contribute to anxiety. Some of us may not even know what we are anxious about. The focus of anxiety is more internal to the individual than external. For instance, an individual may be anxious that something bad is about to happen or about losing control in some situation.

### Anxiety Affects 30 Million Americans

According to the National Institute of Health, approximately 18 percent of the United States population (30 million people), have suffered from panic attacks,

phobias, or other anxiety disorders this year.

American society is experiencing more stress today than at any other time in history. What makes today more stressful? First and foremost, the world that we live in has changed more in the last 30 years than in the previous 300. Our society and its technological changes are extremely fast paced and we have been deprived the appropriate amount of time to adjust to these changes, thus contributing to a lack of consistency and sense of stability in our lives. Stress related illnesses and anxiety in general are the result of a decreased ability to cope with stressors. This impacts our entire body, physiologically, behaviorally and psychologically.

### Physical Reactions

Physiological responses include rapid heartbeat or

## Easy and Effective Strategies to Relieve Stress

- Learn diaphragmatic breathing
- Learn relaxation training
- Practice imagery techniques
- Reduce worry or anticipatory anxiety
- Learn to identify and express feelings
- Develop assertiveness skills
- Regular exercise
- Modify diet
- Fresh air and sunshine



## Psychological Reactions

From a psychological standpoint, anxiety is recognized to be a subjective state of uneasiness and apprehension. This could lead to feeling detached from yourself or fearful of “going crazy.” It’s important for us to identify if our anxiety arises only in response to a specific situation. This type of “situational anxiety” is qualitatively different from everyday fear in that it tends to be out of proportion or unrealistic (e.g., going to the doctors, confronting your spouse). At times, simply thinking about a particular situation can bring on feelings of anxiety.

## Managing Stress

Learning how to manage stress is imperative for all of us. It helps prevent the development of stress-related disorders such as anxiety and depression, impacts our sense of well-being and what challenges we are prepared to tackle. Stress management groups are a great way to enact change. Talking about a problem with other people with similar issues is a valuable way to reduce tension and stress and to facilitate the feeling of not being alone. The key is to find ways to control stress and not let it control you. Stress management techniques facilitate you to identify the origins of your stress, teach you to recognize your personal reactions to stress, analyze your perceptions and interpretations of situations relating to stress.

## Depression

Stress impacts our mood as well as our mental function. At times these imbalances cause anxiety or mood swings and other times they are causes of depression. Depression impacts people who are burdened with stress. Depression is not “one size fits all,” and can vary by gender,



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race, creed, age or income.

According to the National Mental Health Association “clinical depression is more than life’s ‘ups’ and ‘downs’. Life is full of joy and pain, happiness and sorrow. But for some people the sadness does not go away, or keeps coming back. If your ‘blues’ last more than a few weeks or cause you to struggle with daily life, you may be suffering from clinical depression.”

## Clinical Depression Affects 19 Million Americans

Each year millions of Americans are affected by clinical depression. According

### Signs and Symptoms of Depression

- Down mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities you used to enjoy
- Feelings of guilt, hopelessness and worthless
- Sleep disturbances (sleeping more or less)
- Appetite disturbances (eating more or less)
- Difficulty concentrating
- Lack of energy when participating in activities or general fatigue

to the National Mental Health Association, approximately 12 million American women experience clinical depression each year. This equates to about one in every eight women developing clinical depression during their lifetime. More than 2 million Americans over the age of 65 suffer from some sort of depression. While depression is not a normal part of the aging process, there is a stronger likelihood of it occurring when other health conditions are present such as stroke, cancer, Parkinson’s disease and other chronic health issues. Depression ranks among the top three workplace problems for employee assistance professionals, following only family crisis and stress.

Depression is a “whole-body” illness, involving your body, mood and thoughts. It affects the way you eat and sleep, the way you feel about yourself and the way you think about things. Depression is not a condition that can be willed or wished away. Sometimes you cannot merely “pull yourself together” and get better. At times, being

proactive in seeking assistance dealing with depressive symptom is needed.

## Dealing With Depression Is Not A Sign Of Personal Weakness

Clinical depression is very treatable and according to the National Mental Health Association, more than 80% of those who seek treatment show improvement. The most commonly used treatments are psychotherapy, antidepressant medications or a combination of the two. The choice of treatment depends on the pattern, severity persistence of depressive symptoms and the history of the illness.

Depression and anxiety are real and serious conditions. No one chooses to be depressed or anxious, just as no one chooses to have any other health condition. As with many illnesses, early treatment is more effective and helps prevent the likelihood of serious recurrences. You do not have to deal with stress, anxiety and depression on your own. See your doctor or a qualified mental health professional.

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### Health & Wellness Forum

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*BayView Healthcare, also known to many as the St. Johns Welfare Federation, is a private not-for-profit comprehensive continuum of healthcare provider founded in 1920. Our superior level of services includes short-term inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, skilled nursing (Samantha Wilson Care Center), BayView Home Health, and assisted living (Pavilion at BayView and Buckingham Smith) and the Emergency Charitable Assistance Program. Caring Hands – Caring Community is a separate 501(c)3 charitable organization founded in 2004 by our parent organization. It was formed to support the exceptional services and continuum of care provided to people in need of healthcare services and financial assistance.*