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## SOUTH CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA HEALTH CARE QUALITY UNIT

# IT'S YOUR HEALTH SPRING 2012

## NATIONAL ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AWARENESS WEEK MAY 6TH TO 12TH, 2012

Presently in the United States approximately 40 million adults, aged 18 and older, suffer from anxiety each year making it the most common mental illness in our country. Fear and anxiety are a normal part of life, even adaptive in many conditions. Who among us has not studied for a test without some anxiety — and scored better for it? Who has not walked down a street in a high crime district without mounting fear? Normal anxiety keeps us alert — it makes us question whether we really have to walk down that street at all.



**Anxiety is a common life experience.** However, when anxiety begins to interfere on a regular basis with an individual's functioning and a myriad of symptoms accompany the anxiety, they may be suffering from an anxiety disorder. The most common anxiety disorders are Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Panic Disorder, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Obsessive- Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and Social Phobia. Sometimes one of these anxiety disorders can become so severe that people may lose their jobs, have very impaired interpersonal relationships or even wind up in the hospital. Frequently, these disorders are made more complex and difficult to treat because they are accompanied by depression, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts.

### Causes of Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

Research suggests that GAD may run in families, and it may also grow worse during stress. GAD usually begins at an earlier age and symptoms may manifest themselves more slowly than in most other anxiety disorders. The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is harnessing the most sophisticated scientific tools available to determine the causes of anxiety disorders. Like heart disease and diabetes, these brain disorders are complex and probably result from a combination of genetic, behavioral, developmental, and other factors.

### Do Your Symptoms Indicate an Anxiety Disorder?

Consider the following:

- Are you constantly tense, worried, or on edge?
- Does your anxiety interfere with your work, school, or family responsibilities?
- Do you believe something bad will happen if certain things aren't done a certain way?
- Do you feel like danger and catastrophe are around every corner?

- Do you avoid everyday situations or activities because they cause you anxiety?
- Are you plagued by fears that you know are irrational, but can't shake?

Because anxiety disorders are a group of related conditions rather than a single disorder, they can look very different from person to person. Despite their different forms, all anxiety disorders share one major symptom: persistent or severe fear or worry in situations where most people would not feel threatened.

## Treatment For Anxiety

While self-help coping strategies for anxiety can be very effective, if your worries, fears, or anxiety attacks have become so great that they are causing extreme distress or disrupting your daily routine, it is important to seek professional help. If you are experiencing a lot of physical anxiety symptoms, consider a medical check up. Your physician can make sure that your anxiety is not caused by a medical condition, such as a thyroid problem, hypoglycemia, or asthma. If your physician rules out medical cause, the next step is to consult with a therapist who has experience treating anxiety disorders and anxiety attacks. Anxiety disorders respond very well to treatment — and often in a relatively short amount of time. Treatment may include medication, cognitive-behavioral therapy and exposure therapy.

## Depression

We all go through ups and downs in our mood. Sadness is a normal reaction to life's struggles, setbacks and disappointments. We may use the word "depression" to explain these kinds of feelings, but depression is much more than sadness. There are approximately 21 million American adults who suffer from depression making it one of the most common mental illnesses in the country.

Depression varies from person to person, but there are some common signs and symptoms. If you can identify with several of the following signs and symptoms, and they won't go away, you may be suffering from clinical depression.

- You can't sleep or you sleep too much
- You can't concentrate or find that tasks you could once do are now more difficult
- You feel hopeless and helpless
- You can't control your negative thoughts, no matter how hard you try
- Loss of appetite or you can't stop eating
- You are more irritable or aggressive than usual
- Engage in reckless behavior



**Whatever the symptoms, depression is different from normal sadness.** It can interfere with your ability to work, have fun, eat or sleep. The feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness can be intense, with little relief.

**Depression is a high risk factor for suicide.** Thoughts of death or suicide are a serious symptom of depression. Hopelessness that goes along with depression can make suicide feel like the only way there is to escape the pain.



## Risk Factors For Depression

It is believed that depression is caused by a combination of factors which include biological, psychological, and social factors. Depression is not just a chemical imbalance in the brain and simply cured with medication.

Some causes and risk factors for depression may include loneliness, lack of social support, unemployment, financial strain, health problems or chronic pain, relationship or marital problems.

**Understanding the underlying cause of your depression may help you overcome the problem.** Just as the symptoms and causes of depression are different in different people, so are the ways to feel better. What works for one person might not work for another. Treatment begins with acknowledging that you may have a problem and asking for help and support. Effective treatment often includes some sort of therapy that will help you work through the root of your depression and help to give you a better understanding of why you are feeling the way you do. Medications are often prescribed in conjunction with therapy to help improve the symptoms of depression.

The purpose of National Anxiety and Depression Awareness week is to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of these conditions and to educate people about ways to find help.

## What Your Health Care Quality Unit Can Do For You:

### The nurses and behavioral health professionals at the HCQU are available to:

- Be a part of the Individualized Support Plan (ISP) Meeting
- Assist in easing the emergency visit and hospital admittance/discharge process
- Be a part of the Positive Practice Resource Team (PPRT) and Biographical Timeline
- Record Review upon request
- Assist in gaining access to physicians, dental care, assistive technology, medical equipment and hospice services
- Review Behavior Support Plans and assist the team in creating a new plan
- Review Provider Policy and Procedures, as it relates to health care

### The HCQU also offers:

- Educational Programs which address more than 100 medical and behavioral health topics
- Sexuality, Relationships/Boundaries, Personal Hygiene, Healthy Lifestyles and Emergency Preparedness Educational Programs (as well as other various topics) for Consumers
- Access to web-based education programs (more than 65 topics) via our website



## Healthy Vision

Americans are becoming very aware of the importance of keeping our bodies healthy. Being healthy also means keeping our eyes and our vision healthy. There are many things we can do to make sure we are seeing our best.

### Diseases and Conditions of Vision

Although vision loss is not part of the normal aging process, as we age our risk for eye diseases and conditions increases. These conditions may include cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy.

- **Cataract** – the lens of the eye becomes cloudy and causes blurred vision
- **Glaucoma** – pressure builds up in the eye causing damage to the optic nerve
- **Macular Degeneration** – damage to the macula (small, sensitive area of retina) causes a loss of central vision
- **Diabetic Retinopathy** – diabetes may cause damage to the blood vessels in the retina
- **Refractive vision problems**, such as **hyperopia** (farsightedness), **myopia** (nearsightedness) and **astigmatism** may also affect individuals of all ages.



In early stages, some eye diseases have no warning signs. The only way to detect them before they cause vision loss is through a comprehensive dilated eye examination.

### What is a comprehensive dilated eye exam?

This exam is different from a basic eye exam that an eye doctor performs to see if you need glasses. This comprehensive exam is painless, and will include:

**Dilation** – drops are placed in your eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupils (the round opening in the center of the eye). A special magnifying lens is used to examine the retina and optic nerves for signs of eye disease or damage.

**Tonometry** – this measures eye pressure. A quick puff of air is directed onto the eye so pressure can be measured.

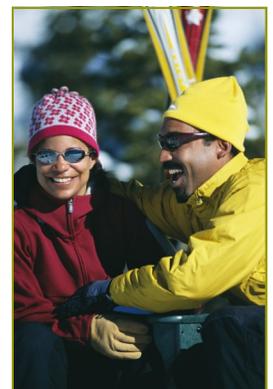
**Visual field test** – will measure your peripheral (side) vision

**Visual acuity test** – uses an eye chart to determine how well you see at various distances.

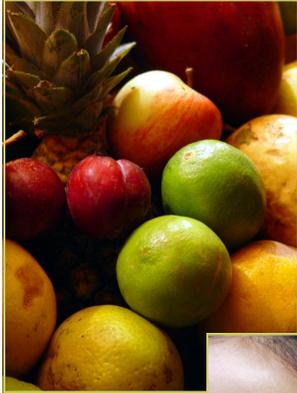
Your eye doctor will determine how frequently this comprehensive exam should be performed.

### What else can keep vision healthy?

- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Sunglasses should block out 99 to 100% of UVA and UVB rays.



- **Wear protective eyewear when playing sports.** Wear protective eyewear at home or at work when there is a risk of getting foreign objects in the eye.
- **Know your family's eye health history.** This will help your eye doctor determine if you have a genetic risk for eye disease.



- **Maintain a healthy diet.** Eating lots of fruits and vegetables, especially dark green leafy vegetables like spinach and kale are known to help keep eyes healthy. Fish that is high in omega-3 fatty acids is also thought to be beneficial in eye health.
- **Keep a healthy weight.** Diseases like diabetes frequently result from being overweight or obese. Diabetes may increase a person's risk for eye disease.



- **Reduce eyestrain.** Spending a lot of time focusing on something, like reading or a computer screen, causes eyes to become strained and fatigued. Every 20 minutes give your eyes a rest by looking at something a distance away.
- **Quit smoking!** There are many health reasons to quit smoking. Smoking is also linked to an increased risk of cataracts, macular degeneration, and optic nerve damage; all of these things can cause blindness.

## Eye Health and Overall Health

Taking care of eye health can benefit overall health. People with vision problems are more likely than those with good vision to have heart problems, diabetes and stroke, as well as have an increased risk for falls and injuries. According to the CDC, 54% of people over the age of 65 who are blind or have impaired vision say their overall health is poor. Just 21% of older Americans without vision problems report poor health.

## When to See an Eye Doctor

According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, adults aged 18 to 60 should have their eyes examined every two years. Adults over the age of 60 should have eye exams annually. Individuals with risks for eye disease should be examined more frequently.

## For more information on eye health:

[www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes/eyeexam.asp](http://www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes/eyeexam.asp)

[www.cdc.gov/features/healthyvision/](http://www.cdc.gov/features/healthyvision/)

<http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=7002229>

<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/index.cfm>

## May is “Better Sleep Month”

**Sleep is as essential for our well being as food and water.** May is “Better Sleep Month”, so in the interest of our overall health we will discuss the importance of sleep in our lives and what steps we can take to get a good night’s sleep.

Through scientific research, we now know that our brains are very active during sleep. Sleep affects our daily functioning and our physical and mental health in ways we are just beginning to understand. Sleep actually appears to be required for survival. Rats deprived of sleep will die within two to three weeks, a time frame similar to death due to starvation. So why is sleep so important? New evidence shows that sleep is essential in helping to maintain mood, memory, and cognitive performance. It also plays a pivotal role in the normal function of the endocrine and immune systems. In fact, studies show a growing link between sleep duration and a variety of serious health problems, including obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and depression. Sleep is a very organized sequence of events that follows a regular, cyclic program each night.

Two basic stages of sleep have been identified. They are **rapid eye movement (REM)** and **non-rapid eye movement (NREM)**. The NREM stage of sleep is further divided into stage 1-4, with level 1 being the lightest level of sleep, and stage 4 being the deepest level of sleep. In REM sleep, there are bursts of rapid eye movements that may be related to the visual images of dreams.



Our need for sleep changes as we age. For example babies require 16 hours of sleep, while most adults require 7-9 hours of sleep. Teenagers on average require 9 or more hours of sleep a night. If we get less sleep than we need we can accumulate a sleep debt, which can be difficult to pay back if it gets too large. Motor and cognitive functions become impaired. Sleep loss affects personal safety on the road. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has estimated that approximately 100,000 motor vehicle crashes each year result from a driver’s drowsiness or fatigue while at the wheel. Also the University of Pennsylvania researchers found that when study subjects were only allowed to sleep 4.5 hours a night for one week, they reported feeling more stressed, angry, sad, and mentally exhausted, with overall scores for mood and vigor declining steadily during the test period.

When the subjects were allowed to get enough sleep, their mood scores improved dramatically.

There are a number of reasons contributing to our not getting enough sleep. Americans are busy, working 2-3 jobs, juggling stressful jobs with family responsibilities, or we have pain and/or anxiety that may keep us up at night. Plus many of us take pride in our ability to function with very little sleep.



## There are also sleep disorders that get in the way of restful sleep. A few of these are:

- **Insomnia**, the most prevalent sleep disorder, is characterized by an inability to fall asleep and/or waking up during the night and having difficulty getting back to sleep.



- **Obstructive sleep apnea** is a potentially life threatening disorder in which breathing is interrupted during sleep. An estimated 12 million Americans have obstructive sleep apnea.

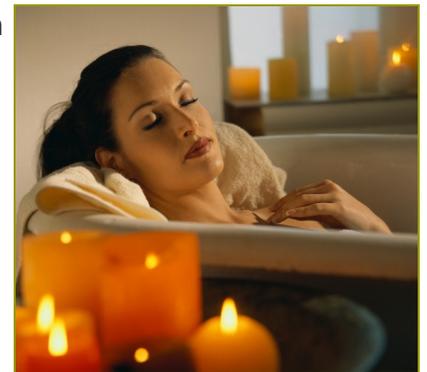
- **Restless leg syndrome** is a neurologic movement disorder that is often associated with a sleep complaint. People with RLS have unpleasant leg sensations and an almost irresistible urge to move the legs.

- **Narcolepsy** is a chronic sleep disorder. The main characteristic of narcolepsy is excessive and overwhelming daytime sleepiness (even after adequate nighttime sleep). A person with narcolepsy is likely to become drowsy or to fall asleep at inappropriate times and places.



## Tips for a Good Night's Sleep:

- Set a schedule, and stick to it, even on weekends.
- Exercise. Try to exercise 20-30 minutes a day. Daily exercise often helps people sleep, although a workout soon before bedtime may interfere with sleep.
- Relax before bed. A warm bath, reading, or another relaxing routine can make it easier to fall asleep.
- Sleep until sunlight. If possible, wake up with the sun, or use bright lights in the morning. Sunlight helps the body's internal biological clock reset itself each day.
- Don't lie in bed awake. If you can't get to sleep, don't just lie in bed. Do something else, like reading, watching TV, or listening to music, until you feel tired.
- Control your room temperature. Extreme temperatures may prevent you from falling asleep and may disrupt sleep.



**See a doctor if the sleeping problems continue.** If you have trouble falling asleep night after night, or if you always feel tired the next day, then you may have a sleep disorder and should see a physician. Your primary care physician may be able to help you; if not, you can probably find a sleep specialist at a major hospital near you. Most sleep disorders can be treated effectively, so you can finally get that good night's sleep you need.

Now Get Some Z Z Z Z Zs

# Food Allergies

How much do you really know about food allergies? Since 2006, allergen warning have become standard on many food labels. A food allergy is a specific type of adverse reaction to a food involving the immune system. The body responds to a particular protein that is read as being foreign and threatening, and the immune system manufactures an antibody that will attach itself to the invading protein the next time that protein enters the body. When the antibody attacks the protein, a whole series of biochemical changes occur in the body, and an allergic reaction results.

It is important to note that a food allergy is different from a food intolerance. Food intolerances are abnormal responses to a food or additive, but it does not result from an immune system response. For example, a person may be lactose intolerant, and so when they drink milk, they experience abdominal bloating, pain, cramps and diarrhea. This is a reaction that is localized in the gastrointestinal tract, not the immune system. One of the greatest differences between an allergy and an intolerance is that

**Anaphylaxis** is an extremely severe form of a food allergy.

Symptoms include all of the above as well as:

- Swelling of the throat and air passages, making breathing difficult
- Shock, with a severe drop in blood pressure
- Rapid, irregular pulse
- Loss of consciousness

true food allergies can result in often immediate, life-threatening reactions. While intolerances can have a significant effect on a person's quality of life, they are rarely life-threatening.

Symptoms of a food allergy often occur within the first hour after exposure to the food. For some people, this reaction occurs within seconds of even being in the area of the food, while other people need to swallow the food for the reaction to ensue.

Common signs and symptoms include:

- Hives, itching or skin rash
- Swelling of the lips, face, tongue and throat
- Wheezing, nasal congestion, or trouble breathing
- Abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, fainting
- 

**What foods cause these reactions?** While any food can cause a reaction, eight foods are required to be labeled as "Major Food Allergens", and 90% of all food allergies are due to these foods.

1. Milk
2. Eggs
3. Fish, such as bass, flounder, cod
4. Crustacean shellfish, such as crab, lobster, shrimp
5. Tree nuts, including almonds, walnuts, pecans
6. Peanuts
7. Wheat
8. Soybeans

There is no cure for food allergies, but some can be outgrown or change in severity over time. Strict avoidance of food with known allergens is an important measure to prevent serious health consequences. Other measures should include:

- Wearing a medical alert bracelet or necklace
- Carrying an auto-injector device containing epinephrine (adrenaline)
- Seek immediate emergency medical treatment with a suspected allergic reaction. This includes calling 911, even if the epinephrine dose was administered.



Figure 1: The "Big Eight" Allergens: Tree Nuts, Peanuts, Soy, Egg, Milk, Fish, Wheat and Shellfish.

<http://healthychoicesforrestaurants.com/big-8-food-allergens/>



## Working Like A Dog

A Service Animal is any dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including a physical, sensory psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disabilities. The work or tasks performed by a service animal must be directly related to the handler's disability.

Dr. Bonita Bergin is the woman who organized the concept of the "service dog" in 1975 to assist people with mobility limitations. She then went on to establish Canine Companions for Independence, the world's first service dog program. While Seeing Eye/Guide dogs have been in the U.S. for over 75 years, the other types of Assistance Dog Programs have only been in existence since the early 70s.

**Assistance/Service Dogs** are trained to perform physical tasks for people with mobility disabilities, such as pulling a wheelchair, retrieving objects, opening doors and drawers and operating switches for lights or automatic doors. In the event of a fall, the dog can be trained to act as a brace so the person can regain their balance.

**Hearing Dogs** learn to alert individuals who are deaf, or hard of hearing, to basic sounds such as smoke alarm, a ringing telephone, a crying baby or a doorbell. The dog is trained to alert the individual of a sound and then lead them to the sound. If the sound being alerted to is a smoke alarm, the dog then accompanies the owner out of the building. PAWS, a national non-profit organization, specializes in training many types of Service Dogs for individuals 14 years of age and older. One such example are PAWS Hearing Dogs, whom are taught basic American Sign Language commands. The Hearing Dog training takes approximately 4-6 months at the PAWS National Headquarters and Training Center.

In June of 2009, PAWs began a 2 year pilot program for families living with Autism. **Service Dogs for Children with Autism** can help with social interactions and relationships, verbal and nonverbal communications, increase a child's interest in activities of play; and decrease overall stress within the family and home life. To a child with Autism, everyone, everywhere and everything is 'outside' of their world. Service Dogs can break into this world by always being there when they are needed by the child. The dog does not care that the child has Autism, he only cares that he is a part of the child's life. The Service Dog can facilitate hand/eye coordination, and teach the child life skills. As the child learns to comb and brush the hair on the dog, they will learn to do it for themselves. The same things can be done with brushing their teeth, bathing and getting dressed. Socially interacting with their Service Dog allows for the child to have a friend-this often eludes children with Autism, as they typically lack the necessary social skills to participate in group activities or social outings.



## Teaching Seizure Dogs New Tricks to Assist

**Seizure Alert Dogs** are dogs trained to assist people with epilepsy or other seizure disorders. They may either alert individuals to on-coming seizures, or react once seizures begin. When their partner begins to have a seizure, these dogs are absolutely invaluable! Some of their skills include:



<http://www.disaboom.com/service-animals/seizure-dogs-enable-independence-for-epileptics>

- Standing guard over the owner during a seizure
- Urging the owner to the ground at the onset of a seizure
- Lying across the chest to keep the owner from standing up while still disoriented and thus preventing a fall
- Pulling potentially dangerous objects away from the owner's body
- Removing pillows and blankets from someone having a seizure while in bed, so the person doesn't smother
- Summoning help, either by finding another person or pressing a button the phone to call 911, and alert service or a neighbor for assistance
- Retrieving medications
- Carrying information about the owner's medical condition. This is often a card that they can pull out and give to a nearby person if a seizure occurs in public.
- A **Seizure Response Dog** is not necessarily a Seizure Alert Dog. Many people with Seizure Response Dogs also report that their dog seems to be able to anticipate when a seizure is coming on, letting them know with signals such as forcing them to lie down, barking urgently, or pacing and acting restless. The lead time prior to a seizure varies from dog to dog, and so does the behavior that heralds an oncoming seizure. Most reputable service dog organizations won't claim to train seizure alert dogs. Often, it's something that often develops naturally when dog and owner have a tight bond, but it can't be guaranteed.



### Golden Retrievers are Golden!

Golden Retrievers have proven to be the best breed for doing service work. That's because their calm disposition and strong body strength (needed for pulling wheelchairs) are important traits for having successful placements. However, it is very expensive to train service dogs. Presently, it costs more than \$10,000 a dog.

Since service dogs are given to people with disabilities free of charge, much fund-raising is necessary to get these canines to the people who need them. The average waiting period to get an assistance dog is currently five to ten years.

### Did You Know?

A more cost-effective way of training the dogs is being developed. It involves getting help from at-risk teenagers in juvenile detention facilities. Only one professional instructor is needed, working with five teenagers at a time. The teens teach dog obedience skills such as sit, down,



<http://thefamilyschooldoghouse.com/2012/03/07/dogs-and-humans/chris-b-and-abby/>

and stay from early puppyhood. Advanced training is given to older dogs in the program, including turning on light switches, pulling wheelchairs, retrieving dropped items and handling money over the counter to clerks.

The teenagers form loving relationships with their dogs, based on trust and motivation. The teens learn the value of positive reinforcement, consistency and praise, and gain pride and a sense of self-worth from their new success.

The persons with disabilities who receive these service dogs have been amazed at how well-trained their new partners are from the training provided by at-risk teenagers.

Many programs that provide service dogs have long waiting lists, are out of state, or charge too much money. Through new resources (DVDs, online groups, etc.), many in the disabled community are training their own dogs to help in everyday tasks. There are a multitude of tasks that dogs can be trained to perform that qualify the dogs as service dogs under federal law. There are more owner-trained service dogs in the USA than the service dogs from all of the programs combined.

**Soldiers Best Friend** is a non-profit corporation dedicated to helping our veterans afflicted with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Their goal is to help our war heroes improve in their symptoms of PTSD, adjust back into civilian life, lead a more productive life and help them build self-esteem. Their motto is, "You fought for us, now it is time to help you back home." They are dedicated to pairing and training service dog with veterans at no cost to the veteran and most of the dogs will be rescued from local shelters.



[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/02/us/more-military-dogs-show-signs-of-combat-stress.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/02/us/more-military-dogs-show-signs-of-combat-stress.html?_r=1)



## Links to Check Out

[www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes/eyeexam.asp](http://www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes/eyeexam.asp)

[www.cdc.gov/features/healthyvision/](http://www.cdc.gov/features/healthyvision/)

<http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=7002229>

<http://www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/diseases/index.cfm>

[www.pawswithacause.org](http://www.pawswithacause.org)

<http://www.disaboom.com/service-animals/seizure-dogs-enable-independence-for-epileptics>

<http://healthychoicesforrestaurants.com/big-8-food-allergens/>

<http://soldiersbestfriend.org/>

<http://thefamilyschooldoghouse.com/2012/03/07/dogs-and-humans/chris-b-and-abby/>

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## IDEAS FOR OUR NEWSLETTER?

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