



8 Mental Health Red Flags

Information from Dr. Antonis Kousoulis, assistant director of the *Mental Health Foundation*, via metro.co.uk. (1/29/18)



If you live with a mental illness, it's vital to be watchful for the signs that your emotional wellbeing is taking a turn for the worse. So what signs can we be aware of, in ourselves and others?

Sleep issues: 'Sleep disturbances are a classic physical symptom that someone's mental health may be deteriorating,' says Dr Kousoulis. Finding it hard to fall asleep at night or waking in the early hours can be a sign of depression, while not feeling the need to sleep at all could indicate the onset of bipolar hypomania.

Eating too little – or too much: 'Mental health problems often have an impact on appetite; it's important to note how dramatic or persistent the changes are,' Dr. Kousoulis explains. Some people with depression lose their appetite altogether; others turn to comfort eating and start to gain weight. On its own, a change in appetite may not be anything to worry about (who hasn't turned to chocolate to get through a crappy day?) but combined with other symptoms, it could suggest your mental state is taking a turn for the worse.

Loss of interest in everyday activities: If you can't summon up the energy or enthusiasm for the things you usually enjoy, and find yourself cancelling plans, take it as a possible warning sign. 'Often, such symptoms only last a few days, but it's important to understand your limits and capacity and take action if they're persistent,' Dr Kousoulis advises.

Changes in libido: When I'm depressed, my lack of interest in everyday life extends to the bedroom. I'm too exhausted for sex, feel hideously unattractive and don't even want to be touched. On the other hand, people experiencing mania may notice a surge in their sex drive, and can't get enough. Changes in either direction could be symptomatic of mental illness and worth paying attention to.

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Problems coping with daily stresses: Stress as a condition is not the same as depression, but if molehills are turning into mountains and you're finding it hard to cope with stresses that you'd usually take in your stride, a visit to your doctor might be in order.

Indecisiveness: I can barely decide what to cook for dinner when I'm unwell, and big decisions are totally beyond me; my husband chose our entire bathroom décor because I just couldn't commit to a choice. 'Something like this, along with irritability and difficulty concentrating, could be an early sign of anxiety or other mental health problems,' Dr. Kousoulis says.

Emotional sensitivity: If you're usually a stoical sort but find yourself literally crying over spilled milk, or are constantly on the verge of losing your temper, be aware of the possibility that your mental health is worsening. Keeping a mood diary for a week or two could help you establish whether there's a pattern you need to be concerned about.

Withdrawing from social contact: Depression tells me that I'm a burden and should just quietly disappear from everyone's life. I cancel plans and go into a self-imposed exile. But if you're mentally unwell, surrounding yourself with understanding people is more important than ever. 'Spending time with the person to support and listen carefully is important,' Dr. Kousoulis agrees. 'But it's equally important to balance the help you can offer with knowing your limits when someone needs immediate professional attention.' If in doubt, book that doctor's appointment: it could put the brakes on your mental decline, and restore you to health sooner rather than later.

Call Milestone for more information and to seek help: 412-243-3400.