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Symptoms: Quick Reference

Plain-English definitions for every symptoms term on Shrinktionary, in one printable sheet.

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Please read

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Agitation

Also: Psychomotor agitation

Agitation is a state of inner restlessness and tension that often comes with increased movement, like pacing or fidgeting. It can be a symptom of many physical and mental health conditions.

Alogia

Also: Poverty of speech

Alogia is a marked drop in the amount of speech a person produces. It's a negative symptom most often linked to schizophrenia, where answers become brief, sparse, and hard to draw out.

Anhedonia

Anhedonia is the loss of pleasure or interest in things you used to enjoy. It's a core symptom of depression and shows up in several other conditions.

Avoidance

Also: Avoidant coping, Avoidant behavior

Avoidance is steering clear of situations, places, people, or thoughts that feel frightening or distressing. It tends to bring quick relief but keeps fear alive over time, which is why it sits at the center of anxiety.

Avolition

Avolition is a significant drop in the ability to start or sustain goal-directed activity. It's a symptom seen in conditions like schizophrenia and depression, not a diagnosis.

Brain fog

Also: Mental fog, Cognitive fog

Brain fog is an everyday term for feeling mentally cloudy, with trouble concentrating, remembering, or thinking clearly. It's a symptom, not a diagnosis, and has many possible causes.

Catatonia

Catatonia is a syndrome of marked changes in movement, speech, and responsiveness. It can occur with psychiatric and medical conditions and is treatable, often quickly.

Compulsion

Also: Compulsive behavior, Ritual

A compulsion is a repetitive behavior or mental act a person feels driven to do in order to ease distress or prevent something bad from happening. Compulsions sit at the heart of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Delusion

Also: Delusional belief

A delusion is a fixed false belief that a person holds firmly even when there's clear evidence it isn't true. It's a core feature of psychosis.

Depersonalization

Also: Feeling detached from yourself

Depersonalization is a feeling of being detached from yourself, as if you're watching your own thoughts, body, or actions from the outside. It's a common stress and anxiety reaction.

Derealization

Also: Feeling unreal, Dreamlike feeling

Derealization is the sense that the world around you isn't quite real, as if you're seeing it through glass or in a dream. It's a form of dissociation and a common response to stress, anxiety, or trauma.

Dissociation

Also: Feeling detached, Depersonalization

Dissociation is a sense of feeling detached from yourself, your body, or your surroundings, as if reality has gone foggy or unreal. It's a nervous-system response that ranges from brief and ordinary to a sign of a clinical condition.

Emotional blunting

Also: Emotional numbing, Blunted affect

Emotional blunting is a flattening of feeling, where both highs and lows are muted and emotions feel muffled or far away. It can come from depression, trauma, or as a side effect of some medications.

Emotional Numbness

Also: Emotional blunting, Feeling emotionally flat

Emotional numbness is a feeling of being emotionally flat, blank, or cut off from your feelings. It's common in depression, trauma, and high stress.

Fatigue

Also: Exhaustion, Low energy

Fatigue is a deep, persistent tiredness or lack of energy that rest doesn't fully fix. It's a common symptom of many physical and mental health conditions, including depression.

Flashback

Also: Re-experiencing, Reliving

A flashback is an involuntary, vivid re-experiencing of a traumatic event, where it feels like the past is happening again right now. Flashbacks are a hallmark feature of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Flat Affect

Also: Blunted affect, Affective flattening

Flat affect is a marked reduction in outward emotional expression, such as a still face, flat voice, and little gesturing. It's a symptom seen in several conditions, not a diagnosis.

Grandiosity

Also: grandiose thinking

Grandiosity is an inflated sense of one's own importance, power, or abilities. It's a common symptom in the mania of bipolar disorder.

Hallucination

Also: Sensory hallucination

A hallucination is sensing something that isn't actually there, such as hearing voices or seeing things that other people don't. It can affect any of the senses.

Hopelessness

Also: feeling hopeless

Hopelessness is the feeling that things won't improve and that the future holds nothing better. It's a common symptom of depression and can be a warning sign worth taking seriously.

Hyperarousal

Also: Hyperarousal state

Hyperarousal is a state of being constantly keyed up and on guard, as if danger is always near. It's a core feature of PTSD and shows up in anxiety, with a body stuck in a threat-ready mode.

Hypersomnia

Also: excessive sleepiness, oversleeping

Hypersomnia is excessive sleepiness, including sleeping much longer than usual or feeling unrefreshed despite plenty of sleep. It can be a symptom of depression and other conditions.

Hyperventilation

Also: Overbreathing

Hyperventilation is breathing faster or deeper than the body needs, which lowers carbon dioxide in the blood and produces dizziness, tingling, and a sense of breathlessness. It's a common driver of panic symptoms.

Hypomania

Also: Hypomanic episode

Hypomania is a milder, shorter form of mania, with elevated mood and energy that's noticeable but less severe. It's central to bipolar II disorder.

Insomnia

Also: Sleeplessness, Insomnia disorder

Insomnia is ongoing trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or getting restful sleep, paired with daytime effects like fatigue or poor focus. It often travels alongside depression and anxiety, and it responds well to a focused therapy called CBT-I.

Intrusive Thought

Also: Unwanted thoughts

An intrusive thought is an unwanted, often distressing thought or image that pops into your mind on its own. They're extremely common and don't reflect what you actually want or intend to do.

Irritability

Also: Irritable mood

Irritability is a heightened tendency to feel annoyed, impatient, or quick to anger over small things. It's a common symptom across many physical and mental health conditions.

Low self-esteem

Also: poor self-esteem

Low self-esteem is a persistently negative view of one's own worth and abilities. It isn't a diagnosis on its own, but it often travels with anxiety and depression.

Mania

Also: Manic episode

Mania is a distinct period of abnormally elevated, expansive, or irritable mood along with high energy. It's a hallmark of bipolar I disorder.

Panic attack

A panic attack is a sudden surge of intense fear or discomfort that peaks within minutes and includes strong physical symptoms. It's not dangerous, even though it can feel like it is.

Paranoia

Also: Paranoid thinking

Paranoia is intense, unfounded distrust or suspicion of others, like a belief that people are watching, plotting, or out to cause harm without real evidence.

Pressured speech

Also: Pressure of speech

Pressured speech is rapid, hard-to-interrupt talking that seems driven by an inner urgency. It's a classic feature of mania and hypomania, and it can also appear with severe anxiety or agitation.

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Psychomotor agitation

Also: Psychomotor restlessness

Psychomotor agitation is restless physical movement driven by inner tension, like pacing, fidgeting, or hand-wringing. It shows up in depression, mania, anxiety, and other states of heightened distress.

Psychomotor retardation

Also: psychomotor slowing

Psychomotor retardation is a visible slowing of movement, speech, and thinking. It's a recognized symptom of depression and some other conditions.

Racing thoughts

Also: racing mind

Racing thoughts are fast, hard-to-stop streams of ideas that jump from one topic to the next. They're a common symptom in anxiety, mania, and high-stress states.

Rumination

Rumination is repeated, looping thinking about the same concern, memory, or fear without reaching resolution. It feels like problem-solving but doesn't produce solutions.

Self-Harm

Also: Self-injury, Non-suicidal self-injury

Self-harm is deliberately hurting your own body as a way to cope with overwhelming emotional pain or distress. If you're struggling, support is available right now.

Sensory overload

Also: Sensory overwhelm

Sensory overload is when input from the senses overwhelms the brain's ability to process it, leading to distress, shutdown, or the need to escape. It's common in autism, ADHD, anxiety, and PTSD.

Social withdrawal

Also: social isolation, withdrawing socially

Social withdrawal is pulling back from contact with other people. It's a common symptom across depression, anxiety, and several other conditions.

Suicidal Ideation

Also: Suicidal thoughts, Thoughts of suicide

Suicidal ideation means having thoughts about death or about ending your own life, ranging from passive wishes to active planning. These thoughts are more common than most people realize, they are treatable, and they are a reason to reach out for support.

Worthlessness

Also: feeling worthless

Worthlessness is the feeling of having little or no value as a person. It's a common symptom of depression and one that deserves to be taken seriously.

Learn more: see all symptoms terms at shrinktionary.com/categories/symptoms