

# Engineering Students Suffer From the Top Mental Health Problems & Challenges

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**Abstract – Nobody understands the effects of stress more than the engineering students. With the unforgiving requirements, the mind-boggling exams and assignments, the pressure of project deadlines, and the terrorizing professors, among others, the stress level in engineering soars to great heights, to the point that it already breaks the mental health of the students.**

***Stress is only one mental health issue. There is also the severe anxiety due to the pressure to deliver. Engineering students are almost always expected to be on top, but this is challenging to do when they have problems to juggle not only in academics but also in personal life. The performance in college often ends up to just passing which leads to frustration. And there is depression. It's a serious mental problem that erodes the well-being of engineering students, characterized by low self-esteem, loss of interest in almost all things, and feeling of hopelessness. The course somehow forces this kind of problem to the students because of the difficult circumstances. This is the ultimate case of mental health issues in engineering that sometimes leads to the students committing suicide. In this paper we discuss which type of problem Engineering Students Suffer from Mental Health Problems, Here's what to do about it.***

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## INTRODUCTION

American College Health Association conducted a survey in 2009 and found that 46% of college students said they felt "things were hopeless" at least once in the previous 12 months. About a third of these students suffered from depression, making it difficult to function. While this speaks about college in general, it just proves that institutions fail in providing psychological and counselling support to the students.

Meanwhile, University of Windsor in Canada recently had engineering students reporting to them about being victims of severe anxiety and stress under increasing pressures in engineering school. In a town-hall discussion, student Eleane Paguaga Amador spoke to a panel of experts for dedicated services in the engineering building and told, while crying, that she had a roommate also studying engineering who died by suicide in 2015.

In India, where engineering is a national obsession, cases of suicide are increasing at an alarming rate. Experts say that most of the suicides are due to fear of failure and the burden of expectations from family. Last year, a third year engineering student at DY Patil College named Atul Kamble has been reported

to have committed suicide by hanging to the ceiling at his rented room.

So what should be done to help alleviate this worsening issue among engineering students? For one, engineering curriculums should be tailored to be not demanding to engineering students. Because engineering students take simultaneous subjects in a semester, they are easily fatigued and stressed. Who becomes excited when think about passing the subjects all at once? There should also be continuous advocating of teamwork and group activities to help ease one's burden in engineering. These are already proven by the system design engineering program at the University of Waterloo, after the institution conducted a survey to analyze the mental health of the engineering students. It revealed that the said program had the best mental health because of the flexibility of the curriculum and a strong sense of teamwork within classmates. Meanwhile, the electrical engineering program had the lowest mental health due to the competition between students.

In addition, the parents of engineering students should also lessen the expectations so not to bring more pressure. This should apply especially in India where engineering is a dream of the mother and the father more than their child. If all else do not work, a

psychological support and counselling program by institutions should help in dealing with stress, severe anxiety, and depression. Nobody goes through these mental problems alone so once it is there, it needs intervention from the experts.

The purpose of this guide is to help identify the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues for college students. Left untreated, these issues can become debilitating and even life-threatening. If you feel that you may be experiencing these issues or find yourself concerned for a friend or peer, it is important to take action now.

And don't forget: you're not alone. Mental illness is very common among students today. According to mental health research conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):

- One in four students have a diagnosable illness
- 40% do not seek help
- 80% feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities
- 50% have become so anxious that they struggled in school

While a variety of other mental health concerns are both topical and common among students today, this article limits itself to five prevalent issues: depression, anxiety, suicide, eating disorders, and addiction.

If you believe that you've developed one of these mental health ailments, try to remember that your friends are looking out for your best interests. They want you to be well, and they are not attacking you. Talking about your problems with someone close to you may seem like a daunting task, but try to let them help you until you are ready to seek the professional help you need to get better.

## DEPRESSION

Depression among college students comes in many forms and, in a survey conducted by the Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors in 2013, 36.4% of college students reported they experienced some level of depression. According to the study, depression is the number one reason students drop out of school, and is a gateway issue that, if left untreated, could lead to other symptoms or even suicide. Depression is a common but serious illness that leaves you feeling despondent and helpless, completely detached from the world. It can interfere with your life, making important everyday tasks such as working, studying, sleeping, and eating difficult. Depressive illnesses are disorders of the brain likely caused by a

combination of genetics, and biological, psychological, and environmental factors. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), depression is the most common mental disorder.

## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms for depression differ from person to person. Ultimately, depression is a result of a chemical imbalance in our brains. The way one person displays signs of depression is not necessarily the way symptoms emerge in others. Similarities do occur but how each person reacts and behaves is determined by how they handle change, where they are in their lives, and their susceptibility to depression. According to the APA, symptoms of depression include (but are not limited to):

- **Physical Well-being Symptoms:** Changes in sleep habits, whether sleeping more or — more frequently — difficulty sleeping. Appetite changes, including either a loss of appetite or overeating
- **Emotional Symptoms:** Sadness, feelings of being overwhelmed, feelings of hopelessness, and feelings of powerlessness
- **Thinking Symptoms:** Seeing a glass 'half-empty,' having trouble concentrating and paying attention, resulting in difficulty in reading and completing work tasks

Displaying some of these symptoms does not necessarily mean that you are depressed. Life is complicated and we all face some of these issues from time to time. However, if you begin to experience these symptoms with some regularity — or several symptoms together — it's wise to seek mental health, if only to be on the safe side.

Identifying these issues in others can be tricky, as students often downplay or simply never talk about something deeply bothering them, often due to insecurities, fear of standing out or embarrassment, and peers can easily misdiagnose one another, sometimes making matters worse.

Incoming college freshman are often told that college is the best four years of their lives. You have a new independence to do what you want (within, of course, legal bounds) and you are free to explore who you are and what interests you most. But with that freedom comes many new factors over which you may feel like you have little to no control, like making friends, getting along with roommates, or choosing classes for a specific semester.

The stresses of being away from home, managing coursework, and finding your path can lead to intense feelings of inadequacy. You may feel

helpless, as if you are just going through the motions, especially when you realize you're not having the fun everyone insisted you would. These feelings, left unchecked, can lead to depression. With that in mind, it is important to understand how to both recognize signs of depression and how to keep yourself healthy.

## RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

Recognizing signs of depression in yourself and others can be tricky. Everyone has off days, or times when they become overwhelmed with life, but most people bounce back in short order. Those days when you or your friends feel down or less excited about getting out of bed should not be cause for alarm. However, when days become weeks and simply getting out of bed becomes a struggle, this is cause for concern.

### What Should You Do If You Start To Notice Signs of Depression in Your Friend?

If you begin to notice signs and symptoms of depression in a friend, there are several steps you can take to get them help. Here are some signs of depression to look for:

- They are not enjoying activities they once loved
- They no longer attend classes or social outings
- They are experiencing extreme anger or sadness over a relationship in their life
- They react negatively or with apathy to most things
- They often talk about death or suicide

Witnessing this can be bewildering and you won't have all the answers. But what you can do is be a good listener when someone attempts to discuss their issues. Offering words of encouragement shows your friend you are a source of support rather than one of criticism or judgment. Avoid telling your friends to "cheer up" or "snap out of it." Many who are depressed are aware of their condition, and telling them to get over it, even with good intentions, is not helpful. They often don't have control over how they feel during their downward turns.

It is important to seek help from professionals for any level of depression, so if you feel your friend is at risk, gently encourage them to seek help and offer to accompany them, be it to a student health center or a doctor's appointment. Remember, however, that while talking through their issues with you may be helpful, it is not a substitute for treatment, and that

depression can worsen or lead to a number of other mental illnesses if left untreated.

## How Do You Know if You're Depressed?

It's important to understand your own susceptibility to depression. Knowing how you handle stress, feelings of isolation, homesickness, and heartbreak may help you realize when you're becoming depressed. But for many who are already depressed, it's difficult to look inward. Depression can be a cycle of dark thoughts and feelings of worthlessness. Soul-searching and self-awareness may not always be possible when you're depressed, but it is important that you try.

*Ask yourself the following questions:*

- Have you experienced extreme sadness or hopelessness?
- Does your family have a history of depression?
- Have you turned to heavy drinking or drug use to relieve feelings of hopelessness?
- Have you experienced invasive thoughts of death or suicide?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, consider contacting your primary healthcare provider or your student health center for a mental health assessment. Even if you don't think it's necessary quite yet, it's good to know who to call. If you feel comfortable speaking with a friend or relative about your concerns, have someone help you research treatment options and accompany you to your healthcare provider.

For non-campus options, support groups can also make a big difference. The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) hosts a handy geographical locator for DBSA support groups all over the United States. Similarly, the Anxiety and Depression Association of America also offers a set of useful support tools.

## Anxiety

Low levels of stress and anxiety are a part of most people's lives. In turn, experiencing these feelings does not necessarily mean that you have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety disorders occur when anxiety interferes with your daily life, halting your ability to function, and causing an immense amount of stress and fear. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) reports that anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S. today. According to the organization's report, anxiety disorders affect 40 million adults over the age of 18, yet only one-third seek and receive

treatment. The ADAA says that nearly 75% of those affected by an anxiety disorder will experience their first episode before the age of 22. Anxiety disorder types can include (but are not limited to):

## SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of anxiety disorders may sometimes be mistaken for everyday stress or simply written off as someone worrying too much. Depending on how your body responds to the increased levels of certain chemicals, panic attacks may be mistaken as a physical ailment, such as a heart attack or a tension headache. Symptoms manifest differently in each person, so what is true for you won't necessarily be true for a friend. Common symptoms for anxiety disorders may include:

- Feelings of stress and apprehension
- Irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Fearfulness
- Sweating and dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Irregular heartbeat
- Muscle pain and tension
- Headaches
- Frequent upset stomach or diarrhea

The exact causes of anxiety disorders aren't fully understood, but they may include a combination of genetics, naturally occurring brain chemicals, life experiences, or stress. If you experience extreme anxiety about exams, it may simply be common test anxiety. Comparatively affordable treatment options are available to students on campus, and the ADAA hosts a list of low cost treatment plans and resources available to you.

## RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

One of the most important things to remember about anxiety disorders is that brief and occasional flashes of anxious feelings or behavior do not automatically indicate a mental illness. But if the anxious feelings persist, or if they begin to manifest in obsessive behavior or an overwhelming sense of fear, then it's time to seek help for yourself or your friend.

### What Should You Do if You Start to Notice Signs of an Anxiety Disorder in a Friend?

College is a stressful time and students can expect to deal with a variety of expected and unexpected stressors through their college careers. While stress sources don't necessarily cause anxiety disorders, they can worsen symptoms. And while, as mentioned above, anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses affecting adults and children in the U.S. today, identifying anxiety disorder signs in others can be difficult. This is in part because symptoms can seem like normal stress or anxiety, and people experience stress differently. For example, your friend may be suffering from an anxiety disorder if they:

- Have experienced a tragic event and do not develop healthy coping habits
- Appear to live in constant fear of failure, academically or socially
- Are uncomfortable and extremely anxious in social atmospheres
- Have trouble concentrating or seem to have a blank mind
- Seem plagued with guilt or stress
- Have visible panic attacks

If you believe someone you know may have an anxiety disorder, be an active listener when they are feeling stressed or anxious, and help them research the next steps they should take. Avoid criticizing or belittling the severity of their symptoms and encourage your friend to try coping strategies that avoid the issues or cause further anxiety (such as those recommended by the ADAA). Encourage your friend to visit a campus health care center and discuss their troubles with a professional. If your friend is reluctant to seek treatment, consider consulting a mental health care provider for suggestions for moving forward.

### How Do You Know if You Have an Anxiety Disorder?

Sooner or later just about every college student experiences stress and anxiety over the course of life on campus (such as exams). But if you begin feeling riddled with guilt or experience frequent anxiety or panic attacks, this could be cause for concern. Distinguishing the difference between regular stress and a disorder can be difficult, so it's smart to consult your healthcare provider if you feel you might be developing an anxiety disorder. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- Are you experiencing anxious or worrisome thoughts on a daily basis?



- Are you plagued by fears others perceive as unfounded or irrational?
- Do you avoid everyday social activities because they cause you anxiety?
- Do you experience sudden heart-pounding panic attacks?
- Is your anxiety interfering with your school work, social life and family?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, consider consulting your primary healthcare provider (or your student health center) for a mental health assessment. An assessment can help determine if you are experiencing an anxiety disorder. Additionally, as mentioned above, ADAA has put together a list of coping techniques to help students living with anxiety that you may also want to consider.

Remember: anxiety disorders are treatable, and if you feel you are suffering, you'll be doing yourself a favor by taking your mental health seriously and contacting a professional today.

### **Suicide**

Suicide is the act of deliberately taking one's own life. Feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and despair can build when students don't take steps to cope with stressors. Suicide affects everyone, including a victim's friends and family.

In a 2011 report from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 39,518 suicides were reported in the U.S., making it the 10th leading cause of death that year. In 2013, suicide was the tenth leading cause of death in the United States, according to the ADAA and, as reported by Emory University, over 1,000 suicidal deaths occur on college campuses in the country every year.

### **RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS**

Many students experience frustration and doubt, but sometimes those thoughts gain an intense momentum, bringing students to a place where they seriously consider ending their lives. Signs of a suicidal ideation differ from person to person. According to the AADA, common warning signs can appear in a person's speech, mood, and behavior. Consider these examples:

If any of the behaviors listed above are present in your friend, it's important you talk to them about your concerns as soon as possible. They could be in a fragile state, so approach them with patience and help them seek out a mental health professional. If you're unsure how to approach your friend, you can

consult online suicide prevention programs for specific advice, such as Crisis Clinic.

### **What Should You Do if You Start to Notice Suicidal Behavior in Your Friend?**

If you are concerned that a roommate, friend or peer is suicidal, contact your campus counseling center immediately. Students who are suicidal often communicate their intent to those around them, so be aware of signs of depression and do not take their actions lightly — you could save a life.

The AADA recommends five steps to take if you suspect someone you know is suicidal:

1. **Ask them directly:** "Are you considering killing yourself?" This may seem blunt. However, according to the AADA, studies show that this question does not increase the likelihood of suicidal thoughts, and it's an important foundation for the next steps.
2. **Make safety a priority:** If they answer positively to step one, ask them if they have a plan. While it may not be easy, removing lethal objects and items in the dorm or home, such as guns, can also make a big difference.
3. **Be there for them:** Sometimes the most you can do for someone is simply to be there for them when they need you. Be there for them and listen to what they have to say. Acknowledge and talk to them about the realities of suicide. According to the AADA, this can reduce suicidal thoughts.
4. **Give them the tools to help themselves:** Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's number (1-800-273-8255) in your phone and, if possible, their own.
5. **Remain in contact:** When and if a crisis occurs or after a suicidal individual is discharged, staying in contact makes a big difference and can potentially save the life of an at-risk person.

### **How Do You Know if You Are Suicidal?**

Suicidal thoughts often stem from a preexisting mental condition. Depression, which causes distorted thinking, can sometimes lead to suicidal thoughts. Feeling completely overwhelmed and helpless from anxiety may also lead you down this path. Mental illnesses left untreated can have dire conclusions.

If you are thinking about killing yourself, tell a friend or call your mental health center as soon as

possible. Suicide is a preventable tragedy, and if you're feeling alone or hopeless, it's crucial that you understand that there are people out there who care. They can help you get past this bump in the road.

### Addiction

Alcohol and drug use has become commonplace on many college campuses throughout the U.S. For some students, what starts as a social tradition can become a full-fledged addiction. An addiction is defined as a dependency and repeated abuse of a substance such as drugs or alcohol. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) reports that:

- About 25% of students who regularly drink report academic problems tied to their drinking habits
- Nearly 60% of college students have consumed alcohol in the past month, and nearly two out of three of those students engaged in binge drinking during the same period
- Almost 20% of college students meet Alcohol Use Disorder criteria

The 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 21.3% of young adults between 18 and 25 used illicit drugs. Of that same age group, 3.8% admitted to using psychotherapeutic drugs for non-medical purposes.

### SYMPTOMS

Many students who participate in alcohol and drug use in college do not develop an addiction, but they will feel the side effects of withdrawal or prolonged use of the substances. Those who do become dependent on alcohol or drugs could show signs such as the following:

- Slurred speech, bloodshot eyes, or impaired coordination
- Fear, anxiety, or paranoia for no apparent reason
- Prone to suspicious behaviors, frequently get into fights or trouble with the law
- A sudden need for money or financial crisis
- Built tolerance for alcohol and drug use; user needs to use more of the substance to obtain the same effects

- Deterioration of physical appearance, such as weight loss or gain, and change in personal grooming habits
- A sudden change in friends, activities, or hobbies

If you experience one or several of the symptoms above, you may be at risk. Genetics contribute to your likelihood of developing an addiction, especially if there is a history of alcohol or drug abuse in your family.

### RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

Recognizing the signs of addiction can be difficult, especially if you've never witnessed or experienced them first-hand. It's not always clear when alcohol or drug use has turned from recreational to habitual, and those who don't want to admit they have a problem will use tactics that evade and undermine your concerns.

### What Should You Do If You Believe Your Friend Has An Addiction?

Alcohol consumption and drug use are common in college environments. This fact can make it more difficult to identify signs of an addiction from the outside. In part due to the pervasive drug and alcohol use and abuse on college campuses, many students don't believe — or refuse to admit — they've become addicted to a substance. However, if you are concerned, there are ways to determine if your friend has developed an issue.

Ask yourself the following:

- Does your friend drink to relieve stress or suppress issues?
- Has their drinking or drug use interfered with their relationships with others?
- Have they withdrawn from activities or school work?
- Does your friend's life revolve around drug or alcohol use?
- Have they developed a change in personality?
- Have you noticed an unusual smell on their breath, body or clothing?

Drug and alcohol addicts often conceal their symptoms or downplay their addiction, so it's important that you express your concerns when you notice warning signs. The earlier an addict seeks and receives help, the greater chance they have at a successful return to sobriety. When they are sober,

tell your friend you've noticed their excessive drug or alcohol use. Emphasize the positive sober behavior you admire and the destructive drunk or high behaviors you're concerned about.

### **How Do You Know if You've Developed a Drug or Alcohol Addiction?**

College is a great time to meet new friends and engage in social activities, but if your drug or alcohol use is negatively affecting your everyday life, you may be at risk for developing an addiction.

If you're concerned, contact your mental health care provider to take an assessment, and ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you feel uncomfortable when drugs or alcohol are not available?
- Do you drink heavily when you are disappointed, distressed or get in a fight?
- Have you ever been unable to remember part of the previous evening, even though your friends say you did not pass out?
- Has a friend or family member expressed concern about your alcohol or drug use?
- Have any of your blood relatives had an addiction to drugs or alcohol?
- Do you sometimes want to continue your drug and alcohol use when you're by yourself?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, or believe you have an addiction, consult your healthcare provider today and find out what your options are for treatment. Addiction is a serious growing crisis for college students today but it can also be effectively treated with the help of a trained healthcare professional.

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