

ANXIETY



What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural human emotion that everyone experiences at different times. Anxiety becomes a problem when overwhelming fear and worry interfere with a person's daily routine. The most common symptoms of anxiety can be grouped into PHYSICAL (changes in your body) and BEHAVIORAL (things you might notice) with examples below.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

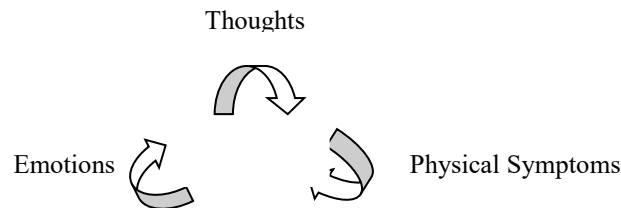
- ◆ Increased heart rate
- ◆ Quick shallow breaths
- ◆ Increased adrenaline
- ◆ Increased muscle tension
- ◆ Light headedness
- ◆ Chest pains

BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS

- ◆ Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness
- ◆ Uncontrollable, obsessive thoughts
- ◆ Repeated thoughts/ flashbacks of traumatic events
- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Difficulty sleeping
- ◆ Worrying about lots of different things

***It is estimated that up to 19 million adults in the United States experience difficulty with anxiety.

Three-parts model



Anxiety can manifest through emotional responses, physically (e.g., sweating, shaking), and through thoughts. If any one of these factors affects the others will following suit, which is why you may realize you feel anxious when you have “butterflies in your gut.”

How to manage anxiety

Anxiety is increasingly treated with anti-anxiety medication which can be effective in reducing both the cognitive and physical symptoms of anxiety. However, treatment with medication alone may be associated with a return of anxiety later on when the medication is stopped, due to the fact that it does not encourage patients to adopt new coping skills. Research has shown that the combination of medication management and learning new coping skills leads to the greatest and most enduring symptom improvement. By learning healthy coping skills and identifying your TRIGGERS (situations, events, people that cause anxiety) for anxiety you can prevent and manage your own anxiety.

Identify your triggers by keeping a mood diary. Write down the times of the day that you experienced symptoms of anxiety. What were you doing when you starting experiencing those symptoms? What happened just before you began feeling that way? Who were you talking to? Where were you? After your mood diary is complete look to see if there are any patterns or most frequent triggers. After you learn your coping skills you can implement them as soon as one of these triggers arises to counter the anxiety response. Examples of common triggers might be sitting in traffic, a busy day at work, your children arguing, a fight with a spouse, handling finances, etc.

Below a variety of coping skills are presented. Learn and implement them into your day. Remember it takes practice! The more you practice the better you will become at relaxation and anxiety management.

Challenging Negative Thoughts

As discussed before the onset of negative thoughts can trigger the anxiety cycle, so it is important to challenge and stop those thoughts when possible. In addition to practicing deep breathing also practice challenging your thoughts as described below to decrease the experience of anxiety.

STEP 1: Examine your thoughts for key words:

- Must, should, have to (unrealistic standards for yourself and others)
- Never, always, every (black and white thinking)
 - This kind of thinking does not allow room for alteration, compromise or change. Using these words casts blame and is judgmental.
- Awful, horrible, disaster (catastrophic thinking)
 - This kind of thinking encourages the sense of despair and doom.
- Jerk, slob, creep, stupid (negative labels)

Changing your choice of words makes a big difference in the way a situation or person is perceived. The way we react to a situation is the determinant of our moods, not the situation itself. Our thoughts influence our moods, so by altering our thoughts we are able to alter our mood.

Here are some simple ways to challenge your thoughts:

1. Question the negative/worrisome thoughts you are having.
 - Is the thought valid?
 - i. Provide evidence FOR and AGAINST the truth of the thought
 - ii. Challenge the likelihood that an event will occur
2. Challenge the need to “fix” all problems, do all chores, or take care of things IMMEDIATELY. Ask yourself, “what is the worst thing that will happen if...does not happen?”
3. Change the negative thought into a positive self-statement.
 - For example instead of “I am never on time, I am such a loser”, say “ok so I am not always on time, but I am not always late either. Sometimes I am running behind schedule, but that does not mean I am a loser.”

STEP 2:

The second step in changing anxious thinking is to accept what’s happening by making reassuring, calming statements to yourself. This helps to keep your initial panic symptoms from escalating to higher and higher levels.

Managing time: Time management skills can allow you to spend more time with your family and friends and possibly increase your performance and productivity. This will help reduce your stress.

To improve your time management:

- Save time by focusing and concentrating, delegating, and scheduling time for yourself.
- Keep a record of how you spend your time, including work, family, and leisure time.
- Prioritize your time by rating tasks by importance and urgency. Redirect your time to those activities that are important and meaningful to you.
- Manage your commitments. Only commit to what is important to you.

- Deal with procrastination by using a day planner, breaking large projects into smaller ones, and setting short-term deadlines.

Lifestyle: Some behaviors and lifestyle choices affect your stress level. They may not cause stress directly, but they can interfere with the ways your body seeks relief from stress. Try to:

- *Get moderate exercise throughout the week.
- *Limit your consumption of alcohol.
- *Balance personal, work, and family needs and obligations.
- *Don't smoke.
- *Eat a balanced diet for a nutritional defense against stress.
- *Have a sense of purpose in life.
- *Get enough sleep, because your body recovers from the stresses of the day while you are sleeping.

Social support: Support from family, friends, and the community is a major factor in how we experience stress. Research shows a strong relationship between social support and mental and physical health.

This type of support includes both emotional support such as love, trust, and understanding, as well as advice and concrete help such as time or money. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness. In fact, it can bring you closer to people you interact with every day, and it can significantly reduce your stress level. If you are feeling stressed, you can look for support from:

- Family members and friends.
- Programs offered through your school or job (for example, assistance programs or stress management courses).
- Colleagues at work, or people you interact with in other areas of your life (such as people who share your hobbies or other interests).
- A professional counselor. Be sure to see someone who has experience and credentials.
- Members or leaders of your church or religious organization.
- Support groups, if you have special circumstances such as providing care for someone who is elderly or has a chronic illness. Support groups may also be available on the Internet.